

PRICE TWO SHILLINGS

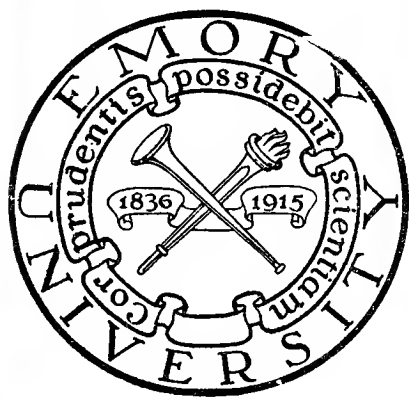
Mlle de Mersac



By W. E. Norris

LONDON: SMITH, ELDER & CO.

ROBERT W WOODRUFF
LIBRARY



MADemoisELLE DE MERSAC

BY

W E. NORRIS

AUTHOR OF 'MATRIMONY' 'NO NEW THING' ETC.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON

SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE

1887

CONTENTS.



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE ANCIENT FAMILY OF DE MERSAC	1
II. IN WHICH JEANNE HAS A DISAPPOINTMENT	18
III. MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS	27
IV. MR. BARRINGTON	37
V. M. DE SAINT-LUC	44
VI. MADAME DE TRÉMONVILLE'S DANCE	55
VII. BARRINGTON STUDIES THE PICTURESQUE	70
VIII. MADAME DE TRÉMONVILLE AT HOME	83
IX. GRAND KABYLIE	95
X. IN WHICH MR. BARRINGTON LOSES HIS TEMPER	109
XI. IN WHICH MR. BARRINGTON WINS A GAME OF BILLIARDS	120
XII. LANSQUENET	128
XIII. LOVE v. PRUDENCE	138
XIV. M. DE SAINT-LUC SHOWS HIMSELF IN HIS TRUE COLOURS	146
XV. THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE	156
XVI. MADAME DE VAUBLANC STIRS UP EVIL PASSIONS	164
XVII. IN WHICH M. DE FONTVIELLE TELLS AN OLD STORY	176
XVIII. IN WHICH M. DE SAINT-LUC HEARS OF SOMETHING TO HIS ADVANTAGE	190
XIX. JEANNE QUARRELS WITH FANCHETTE, AND LÉON SINGS THE 'MARSEILLAISE.'	201
XX. ON THE ROAD TO LA TRAPPE	212
XXI. AN UNROMANTIC PARTING	224
XXII. 'THAT IMBECILE OF AN EMPEROR'	230
XXIII. IN WHICH LÉON ASSERTS HIS INDEPENDENCE	249
XXIV. CHANGES	257

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXV. IN WHICH LÉON PLAYS THE PART OF BAYARD TO A LIMITED AUDIENCE	266
XXVI. THE LAST EVENING	273
XXVII. FAREWELL TO ALGIERS	280
XXVIII. HOLMHURST	288
XXIX. IN WHICH JEANNE TAKES A WALK	299
XXX. JEANNE GAINS A NEW FRIEND	311
XXXI. JEANNE IS SHOWN THE SCENERY OF SURREY	318
XXXII. IN WHICH BARRINGTON DOES A GREAT DEAL OF TALKING	328
XXXIII. ON THE MARCH	339
XXXIV. BEDEORD SQUARE	348
XXXV. IN WHICH BARRINGTON DISPLAYS MUCH TACT	362
XXXVI. MISS BARRINGTON'S PATIENCE IS TRIED	375
XXXVII. BY THE LAKE OF GENEVA	387
XXXVIII. IN WHICH ALL JEANNE'S TROUBLES ARE DISPERSED	399
XXXIX. CONCLUSION	408

MADemoiselle DE MERSAC.



CHAPTER I.

THE ANCIENT FAMILY OF DE MERSAC.

BESIDE a hedge of prickly cactus and spiked aloes, a tall dark-haired girl stood erect and motionless. She was shading her eyes with her hand, and gazing intently at some distant object. From the point at which she had taken up her station the ground fell away in stony watercourses and wooded ravines, till, far beneath, a silvery line of foam marked the shore of the wide expanse of blue sea which stretched away from it to meet the horizon. Behind her was a large garden, in which feathery bamboos, ragged bananas, and tall palms were intermingled with plants and flowers more familiar to English eyes; and directly at her back a rugged old almond-tree spread over her its branches loaded with bloom, but as yet bare of leaves; for the season was the month of February, and Northern Europe was still hard frozen or dreary with gales and driving rain, though here in Algeria the roses were in bloom, and the air was full of the scent of spring.

Bareheaded she stood under the African sun, a graceful, majestic figure; and the breeze, as it swept in fitfully from the seaward, set the rosy almond-blossoms flying, and dropped a stray one now and again upon her abundant dark tresses. As to the fact of her beauty there could be no question; but there could be, and indeed was, a considerable divergence of opinion as to its attractiveness—those of her own sex generally according her their tribute of admiration without stint, whereas men, while admitting that in form and feature she was as perfect as an old Greek statue, sometimes complained that she was almost

as cold, and that for so young a girl she was too impassive and self-possessed to be fascinating. To be fascinating was assuredly not one of her aspirations; that much might be guessed by the most superficial of physiognomists from the proud pose of her small, well-shaped head, from the slightly drawn-up nostril, above all from the serene composure of her curved lips. The owner of such a face could no more be capable of coquetry than Pallas Athenè. Noble she might be, or clever, or generous; but captivating never—unless, indeed, qualities more captivating than the ordinary might, by such as were at the pains to seek for them, be found lying far beneath that calm surface, as pearls lie hid in depths of the Southern Ocean.

Presently an old woman in a white linen cap came out of the house, which stood some hundred yards or so in the background, and peered about her, blinking in the blaze of the sunlight.

‘Mademoiselle Jeanne!’ she called, in a high-pitched quavering voice.

‘I am here, Fanchette,’ answered the girl without changing her position.

The old woman advanced slowly, dragging her list slippers over the gravel.

‘Madame la Duchesse sends to say that she is not feeling well, and will breakfast in her own room,’ she announced. ‘Will you be served now, mademoiselle?’

‘Not yet,’ answered the girl. ‘The steamer is in sight, Fanchette.’

‘Where, then? I see nothing. Ah, that speck in the distance! *Eh, mon Dieu!* mademoiselle, you are never thinking of waiting for M. Léon! Two hours it will be, at the very least, before the steamer gets into harbour; and then there is the custom-house—they will not hurry themselves for king or peasant, those lazy *douaniers*. If M. Léon gets home by three o’clock, I shall be astonished—and you have eaten nothing since seven!’

‘I shall have the better appetite, Fanchette,’ said the girl, turning and looking down upon the old servant with grave, brown, not unkindly eyes.

‘Appetite? That is precisely where you are deceived, mademoiselle. Appetite is a good thing; but hunger is a bad one. Neglect your stomach when you are young, and it will refuse to serve you when you are old—that is what my father used to say; and he was a man full of good sense, my father.’

‘I don’t doubt it, Fanchette; but it will not hurt me to fast for a few hours, just for once.’

‘Who knows? You have hardly done growing yet; and “just once” may be just once too often. If you were a little girl still, I would say, “Jeanne, go in and eat your breakfast, and don’t argue with those who are four times your age, and know better than you what is good for you.”’

‘But, as I am not a little girl any more, I suppose I must have my own way, Fanchette,’ observed the young lady with a smile.

‘Oh! without doubt; we all have the right to do silly things, as soon as we are out of the nursery. Come, mademoiselle, come in and eat. M. Léon shall not starve when he arrives—it is I who promised it you.’

‘Thank you, Fanchette; but I think I would rather wait.’

‘What for, *bon Dieu*? When he comes, you will find, most likely, that he has breakfasted on board; and so long as you have him with you, what difference can it make whether you eat with him or not?’

‘I should prefer to wait.’

Fanchette knew by experience that when her young mistress spoke in that tone further insistence was useless; so she shrugged her shoulders silently, and slowly made her way back towards the house, into which she presently vanished.

The house was one of a type not uncommon in the neighbourhood of Algiers. Having been in the old corsair days which seemed so remote, but which are still well within the memory of living men, the country residence of some wealthy Moor, it had, at a later period, been altered and added to so as to meet the requirements of a French family of the present day; that is to say, that a modern villa, plain, tile-roofed, and uncompromising, had been tacked, without rhyme or reason, or any sense of the fitness of things, on to one end of it;—whereby it had gained much in comfort, and lost as much in beauty. Yet no one could say that the house was an ugly one. Artists, architects, and *dilettanti* were wont, after they had duly admired the horseshoe arches, the twisted marble pillars, the arabesques, and the blue glazed tiles of the older part of the building, to shake their heads and sadly moan over the civilised barbarism which had affixed thereto an oblong and unornamented excrescence with large windows, green *persiennes*, and a red roof; but, if they were honest men and hard pressed, could not deny that the general effect of the

structure was not so bad as by rights it should have been. Sometimes, indeed, when sitting after dinner, in the garden, over a bottle of old Burgundy, while the slant rays of the setting sun fell full upon the white walls, and the sky beyond the Bouzaréah was all aglow, they could be brought to concede that even the modern part of the edifice was not wholly devoid of a certain picturesqueness of its own; but it was redeemed from ugliness (they would explain in such moments) by three things only—firstly, by honest incongruity, no attempt (which must needs have proved futile) having been made by the French builder to assimilate his work to that which Moors alone could accomplish; secondly, by whitewash, which, under the African sun, takes from shadow such soft and delicate tints that the meanest of buildings are beautified by it; and thirdly, by a universal mantle of creepers—jasmine, Banksia rose, and purple Bougainvillea—the last a very gorgeous and luxuriant plant, for which, let us hope, a less clumsy name may, at some future time, be discovered.

But, whatever may have been the merits or demerits of the building itself, there could be no two opinions as to the loveliness of its position. For it stood high on a breezy upland, the swelling hills of the Sahhel on its right, the sea far beneath on its left, and in front a foreground of palm and umbrella pines; the heights of the Fort l'Empereur hiding the old robber city which they command, for middle distance; and beyond, a glimpse of the wide Bay of Algiers; and beyond that, again, the blue, snow-capped mountains of Kabylia melting into the sky. Behind the house were fields of corn and maize, backed by a stretch of broken ground, overgrown with palmetto, which swelled into hills and culminated in the headland called the Bouzaréah, behind whose shoulder the sun sank every evening into a peaceful saffron sky, flecked with tiny gold cloudlets, or into an angry reddening storm-rack, sailing up from the Atlantic, according as the seasons and the wind were.

Algiers, alas! is becoming fashionable. The Grand Army which annually sets out from London, Petersburg, New York, and other cities upon its invasion of the once peaceful Riviera has for some years past been pushing reconnoitring parties into Africa—parties which would doubtless have waxed numerically stronger but for the inveterate turbulence of the Gulf of Lyons. The prospect of forty-eight hours, more or less, of sea-sickness—a very terrible contingency to most Continental minds—has hitherto prevented Algiers from being converted into a second

Nice, and will probably continue to do so, in spite of its undoubted superiority of climate; but, happily for the Algerian hotel-keepers—unhappily perhaps for sundry unsociable individuals—British matrons and maidens are less afraid of the sea; and thus it has come to pass that the Rue Bab-Azoun and the Place du Gouvernement have added to their accustomed motley crowd of costumes—turbaned Moors, white-robed Arabs, scowling Spaniards, Maltese sailors, grinning negroes, and a dozen other quaintly assorted types—a considerable sprinkling of the ulsters, puggarees, sealskin jackets, and Mother-Hubbard hats, by means of which our countrymen and countrywomen are wont to exhibit their appreciation of the picturesque element in dress. During the winter months these good people not only fill the few hotels of the town, but overflow into the surrounding country. The wooded hillside on the eastern arm of the great bay, with its innumerable white villas, swarms with them; and if they have to pay somewhat highly for their accommodation, no doubt they get the value of their money; for these villas, nestling amid orange groves, palms, aloes, and cypresses, and looking out upon a prospect of glittering city, blue sea, and distant mountains, form as near an approach to fairyland as can be obtained within four days' journey of our bleak shores.

It is not, however, in this fashionable suburb of Mustapha Supérieur that the particular house with which we are concerned is to be found. To get to it you must either pass beyond that district, and, reaching the top of the hill, strike across the promontory towards the northern shore; or, starting from Algiers by the Bab el-Oued—the Western Gate—you must mount a steep, winding road, bordered with acacias, and leaving the town below you on the left, gain the little village of El-Biar. Then, after following the level high-road for ten minutes or so, you will see a high white garden wall and wooden folding gates, through which, if you penetrate, you will find yourself in the garden of the Campagne de Mersac. Looked upon merely as a winter residence, it can hardly compare with its neighbours of Mustapha, being colder and more exposed than they; but, on the other hand, it is fresher in the hot season, and it has also—what the villas of Mustapha have not—a very respectable property attached to it. Many acres of fertile land stretch away behind it, inland, from which the owners, after contending for a quarter of a century against much difficulty and disappointment, may be said to have reaped, upon the whole, an encouraging result.

Thither in the year 1845, or thereabouts, had come one Charles Léon, Marquis de Mersac, hoping to find in the pursuit of agriculture in the young colony at once peace and occupation for the remaining years of a life which had hitherto been passed amid more storms and troubles than fall to the lot of most men. He purchased his land—land which, as his reading had told him, had once been as fertile as any in the world, but which had now lain waste, or nearly so, for centuries—set himself manfully to struggle against infinite natural difficulties, irrepressible growth of useless palmetto, want of labour, siroccos, locusts, and many other stubborn enemies which need not be enumerated here; and, in the end, achieved a fair measure of success. He met with a good deal of what is generally called bad luck; but this did not disappoint, or, at any rate, did not discourage him.

‘Disappointment—*ça me connaît !*’ he would often say, with a smile and a shrug. ‘Misfortune and I are old acquaintances, and know how to meet without quarrelling. After all, it is only a question of habit. Sailors sleep quietly in a gale of wind which frightens landmen out of their senses; and I am too much accustomed to failure to be scared by it.’ So before his death the Marquis de Mersac had become a prosperous farmer, which is a rare phenomenon in Algeria even at the present day.

For this result he was indebted partly, no doubt, to his possession of a moderate amount of capital, but in a much greater degree to his indomitable perseverance and spirit, which carried him over obstacles that would have disheartened a man of weaker will. But for this resolute temperament, indeed, he must have fainted far earlier in his career; for he had seen little but adversity ever since that dim winter’s morning at the close of the last century, when, as a child of eight years old, he had been roused from his bed by his pale affrighted mother, and, after a long journey over miry roads and through a country blazing into anarchy, had been taken on board a small sailing-boat bound for Dover. His father, a three-parts ruined nobleman, who had held some office about the court of Louis XVI., took a gloomy old house at Hampstead; and there it was that the young Charles grew up to manhood, and received such education as his parents could afford him. The old Marquis seems to have borne ill-fortune with that mixture of petulance and dignity which is the peculiar characteristic of his nation. Proud, narrow-minded, hating England and the English, he

uttered no complaint, but accepted his long years of exile merely as bad moments to be passed through in silence and patience; refused all hospitality, being unable to return it; and lived the life of a hermit, looking forward always to a brighter future, when right should triumph over wrong, the good old times return, and the king come to his own again. In the great Revolution which had swept away for ever the old order of things in his own land, and was bidding fair to effect a like transformation all over Europe, he saw only a successful uprising of the *bas peuple*; and knowing his compatriots—or believing he knew them—as he did, he never felt a moment's doubt of the ephemeral nature of the new Republic. Nor did the rise of the Empire occasion him any fresh misgivings. Sometimes, indeed, the news of one of Napoleon's victories would elicit from him a few angry expressions of contempt for the theatrical *farceur* (to use his own expression) who had dubbed himself Emperor of the French; but that an obscure Corsican upstart should ever be able to establish a dynasty permanently upon the throne of the Bourbons was a proposition too absurd to merit refutation.

In serene expectation, then, of the ultimate undoing of the Devil and all his works, the old gentleman sat in his dim little parlour one grey morning in the year 1805, and as he listened to the salvoes of artillery booming in honour of the victory of Trafalgar, tapped his gold snuff-box with a certain pensive complacency. But there was another person in the room upon whom the sound of those cannons produced an entirely different effect, and who, at each fresh report, fidgetted and frowned and drummed so impatiently upon the table, that the Marquis was roused at last from his reverie, and looked up with an air of slightly offended surprise. This was no other than M. Charles, who had now developed into a tall, broad-shouldered, and handsome young man of three-and-twenty, and who, in the most reprehensible manner, had begun to hold opinions and form judgments of his own upon many matters; opinions and judgments which, if not speedily corrected, might lead him Heaven—or rather the Devil—only knew where.

'May I inquire, Charles,' said the Marquis, in his high, thin voice, 'what is disturbing you?'

'Sir,' says the young man, 'we have lost a battle.'

'Indeed? I was not aware of it. I imagined, on the contrary, that the fleet of M. Buonaparte had received a crushing blow. But I do not trouble myself much about such matters

at present; no doubt you are better informed than I. Where did this battle take place, Charles ?

‘I was speaking of the battle of Trafalgar, sir, where, as you say, the French fleet has received a crushing blow. The army, I believe, continues to be everywhere victorious. Father,’ continued the young man, in a more animated tone, ‘let me go and fight for France ! Republic or Empire, what signifies the government when it is the nation which is at war ? When peace comes it will be time enough to think of politics. And what is to become of me if I am to remain here doing nothing all my life ? Here I am neither English nor French, nor boy, nor man. I cannot fight for my king—let me at least draw my sword for my country !’ And with this Charles plumped down on his knees, as people sometimes did in those days when they were strongly moved and wanted a thing very badly.

‘Hum,’ muttered the Marquis, stroking his chin. ‘Your mother has to some extent prepared me for this outbreak. It is a point upon which we had better understand each other clearly and finally. In the meantime you may as well rise ; for your attitude will not affect the matter one way or the other, and your frame is too large to adapt itself readily to constrained postures. Will you now take a seat and be so good as to favour me with your attention for a few minutes ? What you propose to do is to enter the service of a man who has usurped the throne of your sovereign—that is to say, to commit the crime of high treason, an offence punishable with death. To ask me to sanction such a course is to ask me to consent to the degradation of our name—which is simply absurd. I do not, however, lay any prohibition upon you. You are of an age to be capable of deciding upon your own course of action. If you can bring yourself to dishonour your father and be a traitor to your king, go. If you think you will not be disgracing your family by caracoling through Europe at the heels of an obscure and theatrical Corsican whom unparalleled events have raised for a time to the position of a successful Robespierre, by all means go. But do not, at any future time, expect me to intercede on your behalf ; and remember that, in the event of your taking this step, I shall cease immediately and for ever to be in any way responsible for the result.’

This was not very encouraging, but it was more than Charles had expected.

Many years afterwards, when he himself was old and grey-headed, he described the scene to his children, and explained

that the old Marquis was in the habit of expressing himself forcibly, and did not expect his words to be taken quite in a literal sense. 'I think he saw,' the narrator would say, 'that it was rather hard upon a young fellow, such as I was then, to be forced to sit idle with his hands in his lap, whilst others of his age were field-officers, and had been through two or three campaigns. Only he could not give an actual consent to my wearing the uniform of the Emperor, but preferred to let me do so upon my own responsibility. If I had known that I should see him but seldom, and my mother never again, after that day, I might have hesitated about leaving them; but I was young, and troubled myself very little about the future, thinking only of glory and the wars.'

To the wars M. Charles accordingly went; and thus we find him, about a year later, charging gallantly as a lieutenant of Hussars at the battle of Auerstadt, where he would very likely have distinguished himself more, had not a splinter of a shell laid open his side early in the action, breaking three of his ribs, and nearly putting an end, then and there, to his military career.

Nor were the adverse fates contented with striking this devoted youth so sharp a corporeal blow, but must needs proceed to direct their arrows against the less easily curable region of the heart. For when poor Charles was sufficiently recovered of his wound to drag a feeble and emaciated body by slow stages in the direction of France, it so chanced that he made a halt at Coblenz, and there fell in with a lovely and fascinating Louise, daughter of the Duc and Duchesse de Joigny, a highly aristocratic couple, whom the Revolution had forced to fix their home for a time in that dreary town. Now the Duc, who was bored in his exile to the extent of almost dislocating his noble jaws by continual yawns, was glad enough to have the opportunity of showing some kindness to the son of his old friend, the Marquis de Mersac, and, at the same time, of satisfying his own curiosity as to the appearance, habits, and manners of the great man upon whom the eyes of the world were, at that time, eagerly fixed. Charles de Mersac, fresh from the battle-field, would, he thought, be the very man to give him the gossiping information for which he longed; and it never occurred to him to suspect that the young soldier's ready acceptance of his proffered hospitality was prompted by any other feeling than a desire for intellectual conversation and refined companionship. To chat over the late campaign with

one who had taken part in it, and to state in detail his own political views to a patient and courteous listener, was an amusement in which, *faute de mieux*, the old gentleman was willing to indulge for an unlimited period ; but the idea that one who had so far forgotten himself as to wear the uniform of the usurper, should aspire to become his son-in-law was evidently preposterous—particularly when, as in the present case, the individual in question had but slender means and doubtful prospects.

The result of this way of looking at things on the part of the Duc de Joigny was that M. Charles left Coblenz rather suddenly, one bright summer morning in the year 1806, taking with him an exceedingly beautiful miniature slung round his neck by a blue ribbon, and that the fair Louise wept for twenty-four hours, more or less, after his departure.

All things considered, the next six years of Charles de Mersac's life may be said to have been tolerably happy. At least, the element of excitement was not wanting in them. He returned to active service, and was wounded over and over again under Masséna and Soult in the Peninsula. Moreover he obtained the Cross of the Legion of Honour, and rose to the rank of Colonel. Danger was his delight, and neither pain, nor sickness, nor hunger, nor even defeat could sadden him ; for he wore always next his heart the miniature he had carried away from Coblenz. He was naturally of a healthy, sanguine temperament, and doubted not that she who had sworn to remain faithful to him through good report and evil report would keep her vow as religiously as he had kept his. So that when he returned from Spain to Paris, invalided, in the year 1812, and weak from the effects of a long fever, the news that Louise de Joigny had been for some time the wife of the old Duc de Breuil, whose estates were almost as broad as his descent was long, was near being the death of him.

But though disappointment is a hard thing to bear, and treachery cuts deep, and the sudden wreck of the hopes and dreams of six years may seem to overwhelm a man for a time, yet these are ills which have seldom been known to prove mortal. De Mersac did not die ; but he set out with the Grand Army for Russia with a heavy heart, hoping for nothing better than that some stray bullet might relieve him of a world which he had now found to be altogether cruel, selfish, and deceitful.

That disastrous campaign proved to be his last. At the

battle of Borodino he lost his sabre-arm, and there took leave of soldiering for good and all.

Brave as he was, and in spite of the philosophy with which he had already accustomed himself to look upon the vicissitudes of life, this last blow went very near to crushing De Mersac's spirit. He never loved to speak of the time that followed, when he lived with his father in the dull old house at Hampstead, which (his mother being now dead) had lost all attraction for him. Nevertheless he made the best of things, after his usual fashion, setting himself to learn how to use his left hand ; and so well did he succeed in this, that, in the year 1814, when his father had departed to Paris to claim his estates, and become a high dignitary at the court of Louis le Désiré, he was able to write with tolerable ease and rapidity, and needed no one to cut up his dinner for him.

It now became necessary that he should be presented to the King of France ; and the prospect of this ceremony cost the old Marquis many a sleepless night, it being so very uncertain how that monarch would receive so erring a member of his faithful aristocracy.

The interview, however, passed off more smoothly than might have been expected.

'They tell me you are covered with wounds, sir,' said the King on that memorable occasion, 'and that you have gained little except a decoration. That is a poor reward for so many years of devoted service.'

'I fought for France, Sire,' replied De Mersac, who did not like Louis XVIII., and could never be brought to address him with a tithe of the respect he had shown to his mighty predecessor.

The old Marquis made a grimace when he heard this curt answer ; but the King laughed good-naturedly.

'The whole nation did as you have done,' he said. 'But the nation has returned to its allegiance, and so have you. I regret very much that circumstances have deprived the army of the services of so brave an officer ; but, if you do not disdain civil employment, you may yet be able to serve your country, M. le Colonel.'

The upshot of this was that a diplomatic appointment was conferred upon the gallant Colonel ; and in this branch of the public service he remained, doing his work creditably, though without much personal distinction, till the death of the King.

He was sitting over his breakfast at the small German

Court to which he was accredited, one morning, shortly after the news of that deplored event had reached him, when his servant laid two letters on the table before him. He took one of them and broke the seal. It contained a brief intimation that his Majesty, King Charles X., had no further occasion for his services. 'Aha!' said De Mersac, 'I expected as much. M. le Comte d'Artois has little love for those who wear neither pigtails nor *soutanes*.' Then he opened the other letter, and over that he sighed more than once; for it announced the sudden death of the old Marquis; and though the father and son had never had much sympathy with one another, the latter was a man of stronger affections than the generality of mankind; and to find oneself quite alone in the world, at a period of life when most men have a wife and children to take the place of the last generation, is enough to afford matter for sad reflection to the most philosophic mind.

And now the new Marquis de Mersac did a thing so grievous and scandalous that his name became a word of warning throughout the Faubourg St. Germain, and moans over his conduct were heard in the highest quarters. He actually sold his ancestral estates. It was considered no palliation of this crime that the culprit was driven thereto by what he chose to consider the necessity of paying the heavy debts bequeathed to him by his late father. The old Duc de Châteaueux, to whom he ventured to put forward this excuse, had scarcely the patience to listen to him.

'Sir,' said he, 'there are certain lines of action which nothing can justify. As you are aware, I have never been one of those who condemned you and others, who were then young men, for wearing the uniform of Buonaparte. You obeyed then a natural and not ignoble impulse. But what you have done now will alienate from you the sympathies of every man who respects himself. One raises money, *parbleu!*—one borrows—one mortgages—one remains in debt—but sell one's estates!—never!'

Facilis descensus Averni! Having started with so prodigious a downward step, what could be expected but that the Marquis de Mersac should plunge still deeper into the abyss of disgrace? His friends were grieved rather than surprised when they heard that the misguided man had invested his remaining capital in trade, and had entered into partnership with a low-born West Indian merchant. After that it was a relief to learn that he had crossed the Atlantic to look after the interests of

his business, and that Parisian society would no longer be shocked by the visible presence of the criminal.

Parisian society saw him no more; but those whose memory carries them back as far as the London seasons of 1838 and 1839 may recollect having met pretty frequently a stalwart, grey-haired, one-armed French gentleman, who bore the title of Marquis de Mersac, and who was understood to have amassed a moderate fortune in the West Indies.

This gentleman was very well received by the leaders of fashion in our metropolis, being, as was well known, the representative of one of the oldest families in France, and having, besides, a comfortable fortune, agreeable manners, and an engaging presence. Among the men he speedily acquired popularity by his skill in horsemanship—a science which then, as now, was not considered in this country to be one of the strong points of his nation; while the ladies could not sufficiently praise his old-fashioned, courtly politeness, his readiness to oblige any one of them, old or young, handsome or plain, and a certain youthful sprightliness which yet clung to him in spite of his fifty six years.

It was a surprise to his friends—perhaps a little disappointment to some of them—to hear that he was about to be married to a certain Miss Moreton, a plain-featured orphan, who already, at the age of six-and-twenty, had assumed something of the demeanour and habits of an old maid. It was thought that the handsome Marquis, old as he was, might have done better; but he never had reason himself to regret his choice. His wife—a good, meek, and somewhat characterless person, who adored him—behaved herself throughout her married life in an entirely exemplary manner. She embraced his religion, agreed in all his opinions—even before he uttered them—accompanied him without a murmur to the African colony, whither his longing for occupation of some kind led him; and there, some time after such an event had ceased to appear probable, made him the father of a little girl, who eventually grew up into the stately young lady whom we saw just now gazing over the garden wall. Two years later an heir to the title of De Mersac saw the light; and shortly after the accomplishment of this latter feat, Madame la Marquise, with a happy consciousness that, in an unobtrusive way, she had done what was required of her by God and man in this world, slipped gently out of it.

The widower was for some time very disconsolate. Like many other apparent nonentities, Madame la Marquise had been

a helpful and valuable creature in her own restricted sphere ; and her husband found that his loss had cast upon him many new responsibilities, not the least of which was the care and education of a couple of small children—a task for which he felt himself to be in no way qualified. Help was, however, in store for him in the carrying out of this last duty. Early in the days of his mourning a very old friend of his appeared unexpectedly upon the scene. A series of trivial circumstances—a slight attack of bronchitis in the first place, a quarrel with her doctor at Nice in the second, and a general weariness of familiar localities in the third—induced the Duchesse de Breuil to visit Algiers ; and, hearing that M. de Mersac had taken up his abode in the neighbourhood of the town, she hastened to renew her acquaintance with him, after an interruption of over forty years.

The former lovers met again, as one may imagine, with a shock of surprise, half pleasant, half painful, with a stirring of many old memories, and a faint throbbing of wounds long since healed over by merciful Time. Between the handsome, wasp-waisted young hussar of Jena and the bronzed, grey-headed farmer of El-Biar—between the lovely, innocent Louise de Joigny and the Duchesse de Breuil, a *grande dame* who had played no inconsiderable part in the political and social history of her country till she had been shouldered aside to make room for the satellites of a new *régime*—between 1806 and 1850, what a difference ! They were, to all intents and purposes, strangers to one another, and yet bound together by a tie which both, in the sunset of their lives, were eager to acknowledge. The ghost of their dead youth rose up between them and joined their trembling old hands. The Marquis showed his old flame the miniature which had accompanied him through all his campaigns and wanderings ; and the old lady sighed over it, and cried a little. This work of art is now in the possession of the present Marquis ; and at the back of it, under the velvet of the frame, still remains a scrap of paper, on which is written, in faded ink, '*Toujours fidèle : Coblenz, 1806,*' an inscription of which the irony may have often struck its original owner.

The Duchess, homeless, childless, and nearly friendless—for she did not happen to be upon good terms with the inheritor of her husband's title and estates, and had no near relation of her own family—was, without much difficulty, persuaded to take the lease of a villa adjoining that which was now known as the Campagne de Mersac. She said it would be useful to her as a

winter residence ; but by degrees her absences became less and less frequent, and ever of shorter duration, till at last it was understood that she considered her home to be in Algeria. She took a great interest in the children of her old admirer, and charged herself with such elements of their bringing up as generally fall to a mother's lot. Léon was her favourite ; as was perhaps natural, seeing that the Marquis displayed a marked partiality for the little Jeanne.

And so the years slipped by, and the Duchesse de Breuil became, in some sense, a member of the De Mersac household. Léon declares that his father and the Duchess used to flirt outrageously, and that he never could understand why they did not marry ; but Léon is a flippant young man, and often says foolish things. It was Louise de Joigny, and not the Duchesse de Breuil, with whom the old Marquis had been in love ; and though he had a very sincere admiration and respect for the latter lady, it may be doubted whether, in his heart of hearts, he ever connected her very closely with the former. The friendship of the two old people was probably not the less strong for the romantic memories which a word or a hint from either of them could summon up into the thoughts of the other, as children by holding a shell to their ear catch echoes of its native waves ; but the romance itself had vanished long since beyond recalling, and was no more a reality now than the sea in the shell. He, being obliged to be often away from home by the exigencies of his farming operations and of his latest hobby, the breeding of horses, thanked Heaven that he could leave his children in the care of a lady, while she was not less grateful for the new interests which preserved her old age from utter loneliness. But for this reciprocity of benefit, it is probable that the *fiancés* of 1806 would not have renewed their intimacy.

The Marquis survived his wife about a dozen years. A malarious fever, contracted at his stud-farm in the Metidja plain, proved fatal to him in the long run, chiefly owing to neglect. He had an iron constitution, and from his youth up had been accustomed to treat all maladies, as the Irishman treated the measles, ' with contempt ; ' but at eighty years of age it does not take much to kill a man, and so the Marquis failed to rally from his third bout of the fever.

His death left the immediate future of his children in some uncertainty ; for though Fanchette, the old nurse, was an excellent and devoted creature, it would scarcely have been advisable that they should be left under her sole care ; and the

only guardian appointed for them was M. de Fontvieille, an old widower, who spent his time between Algiers and Paris, and had no establishment of his own. To the immense relief of this old gentleman, who had been greatly perturbed by the responsibility thus cast upon him, the Duchesse de Breuil came forward with a solution of the difficulty, proposing to take up her abode with the children of her old friend, and to treat them in every respect as her own, so long as her life should be spared. This seemed a highly satisfactory arrangement: but, before finally acceding to it, M. de Fontvieille thought it right to put himself in communication with the few near relations of the orphans—some cousins, resident in Auvergne, and a Mrs. Ashley, a younger sister of the late Marquise. The hearty and unreserved approval of the scheme which reached him, by return of post, from both these quarters, made him chuckle sardonically; for he was a somewhat cynical old fellow, and enjoyed nothing more than some fresh proof of the selfishness and insincerity of his fellow-creatures. He took up his hat, his snuff-box, and the two letters, and presented himself in the drawing-room of his friend the Duchess.

‘Madame,’ said he, bending over her hand in his old-fashioned way, ‘you are free to carry out your benevolent intentions; the family will not oppose itself to you. They had been eager to welcome their young relations, but they think themselves bound to consult the dear children’s wishes rather than their own.’

‘No one cares to add two strangers to his family,’ observed the Duchess, more charitably; ‘to most people such a necessity would be a misfortune; to me, as it happens, it is a blessing.’

So she packed up her belongings, and moved from her villa to the Campagne de Mersac, where she was received with unfeigned joy. The young people were fond of her, and infinitely preferred remaining in the old home, under her tutelage, to going among strangers; and she, on her side, loved them, and did her duty by them, according to her lights.

With Jeanne she was not able to feel much sympathy. The girl’s inordinate grief at her father’s death—a grief which showed itself in no violent form, but only by pallor, listlessness, heavy eyes, and a morbid shrinking from all amusements—puzzled her at first, and then irritated her. To show feeling in such a case, the Duchess admitted, was only proper and becoming; but then feeling should be manifested in recognised ways, otherwise one did not know how to deal with it, and it became an absolute nuisance. It was not natural that a girl of fifteen

should mope and mourn for a twelvemonth and more because things had taken their natural course, and her father had gone to his long home after reaching the extreme limit of life accorded to man by the Psalmist. Moreover, Jeanne was so proud, so reserved, so perfectly imperturbable, that the Duchess, who was secretly a little afraid of her, was conscious of a disinclination, which strengthened as the years went on, to tell her of her faults; and this, as everyone must allow, is a sad obstacle in the way of any real cordiality of intercourse.

So, although the Duchess and Jeanne were, upon the whole, very good friends, by far the larger share of the former lady's affections was given to Léon, who certainly possessed what most people would consider a more lovable character than that of his sister. The education of the young Marquis was conducted entirely at home—a system not uncommon in France, and one perhaps less disadvantageous to a boy in that country than in this. The Curé of El-Biar grounded him in his own language and in Latin, and continued to superintend his daily lessons till he had reached an age which was considered sufficiently advanced to warrant the engagement of a tutor for him; Madame la Duchesse (who had every reason to consider herself eminently qualified for the task) instructed him in manners and deportment; M. de Fontvieille (with no less confidence in his capacity) imparted to him a knowledge of men and things, derived from many years' philosophical study of an infinitesimal section of humanity; and Pierre Cauvin, a shrewd old Auvergnat, who had been his father's factotum ever since the first purchase of the Algerian property, taught him agriculture and the art of breaking horses. And all these good people adored and spoiled him in the most inexcusable manner.

The consequence of their co-operation was much what might have been anticipated—or perhaps it ought rather to be said that it was better than might have been anticipated. At the time our story opens Léon was a singularly handsome young fellow of one-and-twenty, tall, broad-shouldered, sunburnt, a very fair shot, a good dancer, and a really excellent rider. He was tolerably well read, and quick at catching up any scraps of information that might come in his way. His manner, always that of the old school, had, towards strangers, a considerable tinge of frigidity and *hauteur*; but in the family circle he was given to be talkative, and expressed his views upon all matters with perfect freedom. He placed, indeed, a somewhat exaggerated estimate upon the value of his own opinions; as was

not unnatural, considering the nature of his training. That he did not grow up an insufferable young prig was probably owing partly to the bracing effects of outdoor life and the constant contact with unmanageable agricultural difficulties, partly to a certain hereditary simplicity of disposition, and finally to the influence of his sister Jeanne, the only person in the world of whom he felt any awe, and who loved him far too well to flatter him. Taking him altogether, he bade fair to become no unworthy representative of a fine old Legitimist family; and, feeling this, the Duchess and M. de Fontvieille looked upon the result of their labours and were content.

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH JEANNE HAS A DISAPPOINTMENT.

MADemoiselle de Mersac, whose character exhibited a good many traits of a kind more or less puzzling to her friends, was in nothing more incomprehensible to them than in her prolonged and voluntary spinsterhood. A young lady of the quasi-mature age of three-and-twenty, beautiful, well-dowered, of excellent family, and still unmarried, is no ordinary phenomenon in French society; but then Mademoiselle de Mersac was not an ordinary person, nor were her circumstances ordinary circumstances. Had she occupied a position analogous to that of her neighbours, her matrimonial affairs would, of course, have been arranged for her long since by provident parents; but Fate had decreed that she should make her *début* in society as an orphan, and, further, that she should do so in the exceptional character of absolute mistress of her own destinies. For the late Marquis de Mersac, influenced by his English education, his English wife, and also perhaps by certain melancholy experiences of his own, had harboured, and frequently expressed, an intention that his daughter should choose her husband for herself *à la mode anglaise*. Whether, after his death, his desires would have been respected by the Duchesse de Breuil (who, for her part, thought them eminently injudicious), had that lady possessed the power of opposing them, is at least open to doubt; but, happily or unhappily for Jeanne, she had no such power. Mademoiselle de Mersac's marriage portion was,

by her father's will, held in trust for her till the day of her wedding or the completion of her thirtieth year, at either of which dates it became her absolute property; and thus, as the Duchess sometimes complained bitterly to her intimate friends, there was nothing to prevent the young lady from marrying a negro if she felt so disposed. By what possible means any further restriction could have been laid upon her young *protégée* the Duchess did not stop to inquire; but it was a sad reflection to her that the only weapon at her disposal for coercing Jeanne into a suitable alliance was that of moral force, and a still sadder that this weapon had hitherto proved a wholly ineffectual one. She did what she could. She brought forward suitor after suitor of the most unexceptionable sort; but Jeanne would have nothing to say to any of them, and showed herself completely impervious to persuasion, scolding, or tears.

'You will kill me with your wicked obstinacy!' the poor old Duchess would cry after each of her periodical failures; and then Jeanne would kiss her, wipe away her tears and comfort her, as a mother comforts a fractious child. But the Duchess, of course, did not die of vexation, and, equally of course, Jeanne did not give way.

Algerian society, busying itself about its neighbours' concerns with no less gusto than all other human communities, great and small, had several explanations of Mademoiselle de Mersac's conduct to offer. Some said she had formed an unfortunate attachment; others had discovered that the one passion of her nature was an insatiable ambition, and that she aspired to some more splendid alliance than could be looked for in a colony; while the more charitable declared that she had vowed to sacrifice her life to taking care of the interests and well-being of her brother, to whom her devotion was notorious, and whose habits, indeed, had of late shown some dawning symptoms of needing judicious supervision. Nobody, of course, accepted the young lady's own assertion that she had not yet met a man whom she cared to contemplate as a husband, because nobody ever does accept the most natural and probable solution of an enigma. It happened, however, to be true.

At the same time, there was some foundation for the statement that her brother's happiness, rather than her own, was the chief aim and object of Jeanne's existence. She had naturally strong affections, and loved her species as well as most of us and a good deal better than some; but she had not the power of interesting, or seeming to interest, herself in the

trivial concerns of people of whom she knew nothing ; her manner was often cold, and when she felt bored, she looked bored. She was not, therefore, by any means universally popular ; nor, to tell the truth, did she greatly covet popularity. Intimate friends she had none, and, never having had any, did not regret their absence. All the more did she long for the love of those whom she herself loved ; and of this very select few, Léon was, after her father's death, by far the most important person. From his babyhood the boy had been her especial charge, and, though she was by so little his senior, her influence and authority over him were greater than those of many a mother over her son. By instinct probably as much as by judgment she managed to maintain that influence up to a time at which the generality of young men have little respect for their sisters' opinions. At the age of one-and-twenty Léon had not abandoned the habit of consulting Jeanne in every difficulty ; and if he had any secrets from her, they were as yet few. In matters connected with farming he would as soon have thought of applying for advice to one of his Arab grooms as to either of the excellent old people who stood towards him, in some sort, in the relation of parents ; but he seldom sold a horse, or bought a strip of land, or concluded a bargain of any kind, without having first taken his sister's opinion ; and he was not far wrong, for Jeanne had been at infinite pains to inform herself upon all subjects affecting her brother's welfare, and was not to be taken in as to the value of horse or land by any sharp customer, whether Christian or heathen.

Nor, while looking after Léon's pecuniary interests, was Jeanne insensible to the advisability of his seeing something more of men and the world than he could do in Algeria. She had several battles to fight on this point with M. de Fontvieille, who had seen the world in his time, and thought that young men were best kept out of it ; and with the Duchess, who considered that the world had virtually come to an end with the deposition of Charles X., or at least that it was passing through a period of interregnum during which people of quality could but shrug their shoulders and ignore it. She carried her point, however, as quiet, persistent folks commonly do ; and thus the young Marquis was permitted from time to time to make journeys to Paris, upon one pretext or another ; and derived therefrom amusement, experience, and possibly some elements of ultimate profit.

The periods of his absence were always dreary ones for

Jeanne; and on the particular occasion on which we have to make her acquaintance, she was more than ordinarily anxious for the wanderer's return, both because he had been longer away than usual, and because his trip had, this time, extended as far as England, whither he had gone with the double object of purchasing certain articles of farm machinery and of introducing himself to the surviving members of his mother's family. Mademoiselle de Mersac, whose imperturbability was mistaken by most of her friends for indifference, possessed (under proper control) a very fair share of feminine inquisitiveness, and she thought she would enjoy her breakfast more if she put off eating it till she was able to combine the necessary support of the flesh with gratification of some legitimate curiosity as to the appearance and manners of these unknown English cousins.

She paced slowly up and down the gravel paths, pausing every now and again to bend her beautiful face over a freshly-opened rose or to pull up a weed from the well-kept border. She was not in a mood for occupation, and preferred remaining out of doors, though the breeze had died away and the sun was beating down with a force which would have driven most people to seek for shade. But Jeanne, unlike the generality of Southerners, had no fear of the sun's rays. She seated herself presently upon a low bench, and contemplated with dreamy satisfaction the broad, glittering stretch of sea which no longer separated her from her brother.

The air was hushed and drowsy; there was not a breath of wind to set the bananas and bamboos whispering; the fountain had ceased to play (for water is a precious commodity in Algeria, and must not be too unsparingly made use of); the house, behind whose closely-shut green *persiennes* Madame la Duchesse was even now making her toilette with the assistance of her maid, was silent as the grave. Only, from the distant stables, came the sound of an occasional stamp or a half-smothered hinny. The world was taking its noonday siesta; and it almost seemed to Jeanne as if old Time himself had yielded to the slumberous influence, and was indulging himself with a short nap, so slowly did the minutes move. At length, after having consulted her watch half-a-dozen times, and held it to her ear to ascertain that it had not stopped, she made a brief calculation.

'Ten minutes to get on shore—a quarter of an hour at the Custom-house—half an hour to canter up the hill—and, say,

another ten minutes to talk to any friends he may meet in the town—that makes an hour and five minutes,’ she murmured. ‘According to that, he ought to be here almost immediately.’

And, sure enough, before the words were well past her lips, there came from the distance a sound which made her start to her feet—the steady trot, trot of a couple of horses upon the high road. More faintly for a moment or two, then loud and clear again came the rhythmic beat of the hoofs, drawing rapidly nearer and nearer till they halted at length within a few yards of the anxious listener’s ear. The creaking gates swung open; there was a stamping and crushing of the gravel; and Jeanne, stepping out from behind the cypresses which bordered the avenue, with a glad smile of welcome illumining her face, met—a well-mounted Arab groom conducting a led horse.

The man pulled up at once, threw his leg over his horse’s head, slid to the ground, thrust his hand into one of the pockets of his baggy breeches, and, after fumbling for a time in apparently unfathomable depths, captured a scrap of paper which, with a low bow, he held out to his young mistress. Jeanne took it, and read the following words, hastily scrawled in pencil: ‘Arrived safe and sound. Saint-Luc has persuaded me to breakfast with him at the Hôtel d’Orient. Shall be with you before dinner-time. I embrace you a thousand times.—LÉON. If you were inclined to be very amiable you might just walk round to the yard, and see that Hamid lets the grey cool before taking off his saddle. You know what the rascal is; and I cannot afford to have another horse marked for life by a sore back.’

Jeanne had at all times an almost perfect command of feature. With a heart aching with disappointment and mortification, and a sense of injury somewhat greater perhaps than her brother’s thoughtless offence merited, she was nevertheless, to all outward seeming, entirely unmoved. She folded up the scrap of paper deliberately, dismissed the untrustworthy Hamid with a smile and a nod, and presently, in pursuance of the directions she had received, followed him to the stable-yard. A colony of dogs, large and small, came out to meet her, and cringed at her feet, or leapt up upon her, according to their several ages and characters; a jackal, chained to his kennel, flew wildly backwards and forwards, at the utmost limit of his tether, till he choked and nearly made himself sick; a wild boar, also chained, bounced out from a barrel, in which he had been concealed, and stood blinking his angry little red eyes,

and snorting a welcome ; and a peacock, after sidling doubtfully round the outskirts of the canine escort and establishing his authority by one or two savage pecks at a small woolly pup, swept up to her side with the conscious dignity of an assured favourite. She had a caress for each and all of them ; it was never Jeanne's way to vent her vexation upon her surroundings. She scratched the boar's back with the tip of her parasol, reasoned with the impetuous jackal, played with the dogs, and fed the peacock just as usual ; and it was not until she had seen the grey horse led away into his stable that she turned and walked slowly towards the house. A huge white Pyrenean dog, the only one of the pets who had the privilege of crossing the threshold, stalked solemnly after her.

Meeting her old nurse in the hall, she begged her to order breakfast, mentioning that M. Léon had arrived safely, but that he would not be home before dinner-time. ' Did I not tell you so ? ' cried Fanchette triumphantly. But Jeanne made no reply. What Fanchette's prediction might have been did not seem to her a matter of much importance ; the lamentable fact was that her brother had preferred the company of a chance acquaintance to her own ; and she was foolish enough to take this slight so much to heart that it was only with difficulty that she managed to swallow a small portion of the repast which was shortly set before her.

This task accomplished, she rose from the table and betook herself to the drawing-room, followed by Turco, the hound before mentioned.

The *salon* of the Campagne de Mersac was the pride of its owners and the envy of its neighbours. It was in the older portion of the building, of which, indeed, it occupied the entire length ; and, after the usual Moorish plan, was oblong in shape and had a deep recess, or *marabout*, jutting out on either side. One of these, which had several narrow, pointed windows commanding a wide view of the sea, was partly filled by a mass of ferns and flowering-plants, while that facing it had been fitted up as a small library, and displayed well-bound editions of Racine, Corneille, Montesquieu, Fénelon, and other unexceptionable writers ; for the Duchesse de Breuil did not approve of indiscriminate reading for young people, and kept such unprofitable modern works as she required for her own amusement carefully under lock and key upstairs. The room was rather dark owing to the smallness of the windows and the great thickness of the walls—for here, as always, the design of the

old Moorish builders had been to exclude sunshine and heat—but it was not too dark; only pleasantly dim, cool, and silent, and the delicate tracery of the white plaster arabesques on the walls showed to greater advantage in the semi-obscurity than it would have done in a stronger light. The glazed blue and white tiles of the floor had not been altogether hidden from view by a carpet, as is the case in some Algerian houses; but some handsome Turkey rugs had been placed here and there, and there were two fine lion skins, trophies of the success of the old Marquis's gun in the days of his early life in the African colony. The furniture, though not very fresh or modern in type, was solid and comfortable; nor was there any lack of luxurious sofas and armchairs.

Beside the fireplace, where a wood fire was blazing cheerfully, stood a deep, low *fauteuil*, which Jeanne now proceeded to prepare for the only person who was ever permitted to occupy it. She arranged the cushions, dragged up a footstool and a small table, on which last she placed a vase full of fresh roses, and then, stationing herself in the *marabout*, stood, with her hands behind her back, gazing out rather sadly on the sunny prospect till the rustle of a silk dress behind her made her turn round.

A little, bent, withered old lady, beautifully dressed, came in, leaning on a stick, and glanced sharply from side to side. Then she walked straight up to Turco, who was lying outstretched in the middle of the room flapping his tail sleepily in token of welcome, and prodded him in the ribs.

'That dog has sworn to bring about my death,' said she, shaking her stick at the delinquent. 'He knows very well that a fall would be fatal at my age, and that I cannot see two inches before my nose, when I come into this dark room from outside; and so he deliberately places himself in my path, hoping that I shall trip over him, come down, and break every bone in my body. Fortunately, Nature has made him white; if he had been a brown or a black monster, I should have been in the Kingdom of Heaven months ago.'

Jeanne advanced and kissed the old lady's hand, after the graceful old fashion to which she had been trained, and led her to her armchair.

The Duchess sank down among the cushions, arranged her dress so that it fell in graceful folds about her, placed her tiny feet upon the footstool, and then, raising her eyebrows interrogatively—

‘And Léon?’ said she.

‘He will not be home before dinner-time,’ answered Jeanne. ‘Hamid brought me a line from him to say that he had arrived, but that he was stopping to breakfast in the town.’

‘To breakfast in the town!’ echoed the old lady sharply; ‘why should he do that? It is not kind—it is a want of respect to me. Oh, my dear, I understand what you mean by your calm face! To you a few hours more or less may seem a small matter; but at my age every moment of time has its value; and besides that, I don’t like to think that my boy cares so little about seeing us again that he is ready to turn aside, as soon as he lands, to breakfast with the first one he meets. Who is his friend?’

‘M. de Saint-Luc, I believe.’

The Duchess’s features relaxed perceptibly. ‘Well, well,’ she said, ‘he might have remembered that we should be longing to embrace him; but young men will be thoughtless; and at least I am glad that he chooses his friends well. That M. de Saint-Luc is charming—quite charming!’

There is a certain method of assertion, as everybody knows, which seems to court denial; and there is a certain kind of silence which is infinitely more aggravating than the flattest contradiction. The Duchess found her encomium on M. de Saint-Luc met with such imperturbable and emphatic speechlessness on the part of Jeanne that she could not help adding, with a considerable spice of irritability—

‘You do not like M. de Saint-Luc. But this is of course. If a man be clever, gentlemanly, agreeable, superior to the ordinary run—if he please me, in short—that is sufficient. You ask no better reason for honouring him with your detestation.’

Jeanne smiled slightly, and put a fresh log upon the fire.

‘After all,’ resumed the Duchess, ‘what can you have to say against M. de Saint-Luc?’

‘I have said nothing against him, madame,’ replied Jeanne, who, it must be allowed, was far more exasperating at times than she had any knowledge or intention of being.

‘No; but you look as if you could say a great deal if you chose, and that is much worse. And it is ridiculous, too, because it is impossible that you can know anything to his disadvantage.’

The latter part of this remark was made in so interrogative a tone that Jeanne could scarcely avoid making some reply to

it. So she said in her slow, deliberate way, 'I do not think him a good friend for Léon.'

The Duchess emitted a short, high laugh. 'In that case of course there is nothing more to be said. Your knowledge of the world is so great, your experience is naturally so much larger than mine, you are so well acquainted with the private lives of young men, that it only remains for us to warn Léon against having anything further to do with M. de Saint-Luc.'

Speeches of this kind seldom annoyed Jeanne. She had too little *amour propre* to be stung by such tiny shafts of sarcasm.

'I have already done that,' she remarked quietly.

'Really! and in spite of that it seems that Léon persists in choosing his own friends for himself. Might one venture to inquire what M. de Saint-Luc has done to incur your dislike?'

'I neither like nor dislike him,' answered Jeanne, with a slight disdainful gesture; 'I care nothing about him. But I do not think his company is likely to do Léon any good. He is a gambler; he has dissipated his fortune by betting and card-playing in Paris.'

This happened to be true, and the Duchess knew it. But she had her own reasons for wishing to represent M. de Saint-Luc in a favourable light.

'Bah! follies of youth—what would you have?' she returned, shrugging her shoulders. 'The best of men are often a little wild at starting. Look at our good M. de Fontvieille. I recollect him as one of the most notorious *viveurs* of his day. M. de Saint-Luc will settle down, and become as good a husband and father as a thousand others.'

'Very possibly,' said Jeanne. 'I was not thinking of M. de Saint-Luc's future, but of his influence upon Léon, whom you would hardly like to see following his example.'

'Léon is different,' answered the Duchess decisively. 'Léon is a man of principles: he will not be easily led astray.'

And this assertion Jeanne did not see fit to contradict.

'But I think,' resumed the Duchess, recurring, after a pause, to her original grievance, 'I think Léon should have paid me the compliment of coming here before visiting other friends: age is not respected now as it was in my time. He might have remembered, too, that this is my reception-day, and that it would be highly inconvenient if he should present himself when the room is full of people. If he should arrive early, Jeanne, you must go out and keep him away till I am alone; I cannot let myself be agitated in the presence of strangers. I

have no longer the strength that I once had ; and I begin to dread this weekly crowd of visitors. It is only for your sake, my child, that I continue to receive at all. Were I living alone, I should shut myself up with my books and my memories till the time came for me to leave this weary world.'

CHAPTER III.

MONSIEUR LE MARQUIS.

IT was the Duchess's custom to speak plaintively of the necessity she felt herself to be under of mixing in Algerian society. 'A crowd of colonists, of small officials, of officers *en retraite* and their wives—judge whether I find the conversation of these people amusing!' she would sigh sometimes to her intimates. But in truth she greatly enjoyed patronising the good folks of whom she spoke so slightly, and was happier on Monday (which was her reception-day) than on any other day of the seven. Nor was she wholly dependent for companionship upon the three above-mentioned classes. A few Legitimist families—offshoots, more or less poverty-stricken, of the great houses whose names they bore—had established themselves in the neighbourhood of Algiers; and of their support in the fatiguing task of entertaining her inferiors the Duchess was as sure as she was of their affection and reverence. Surrounded by these, the old lady held her little weekly court, and dispensed smiles and frowns with all the judicious tact of a reigning sovereign. There had been a time when the favourable notice of the Duchesse de Breuil was not only a passport into the highest circles of the Parisian world, but often carried with it more substantial advantages; but those days were gone and well-nigh forgotten, like the ministers, the great ladies, the office-seekers, and the toadies who had played their little parts under Charles X., and had long since been replaced by other sets of actors who knew them not nor cared for them. Now, in her old age, it pleased the Duchess to think that some remnant of power still clung to her, were it only that of leading the most exclusive set in a colony.

If some of the younger and more fashionable Algerian ladies laughed at her a little behind her back, we may be sure that

they controlled their features and were mighty respectful in her presence; for, after all, a duchess of the old nobility is a duchess, be she never so antiquated and overlooked; and as Madame de Breuil's door was not by any means open to all comers, such of the officials of the Second Empire as she chose to receive seldom missed an opportunity of paying their respects to her, and looked upon her recognition of them as in some sort a brevet of rank.

Monday afternoons, therefore, usually saw a sufficiency of equipages and pedestrians toiling up the hill to El-Biar, and the particular Monday afternoon with which we are concerned was no exception to the general rule. Shortly before four o'clock the visitors began to arrive, and soon the room was nearly filled by a somewhat heterogeneous assemblage. There were stern Legitimist dames and sleek Imperial functionaries; a turbaned Moor and a dignitary of the Church; a Chasseur d'Afrique or two, resplendent in blue and silver and scarlet; and a sprinkling of foreigners domiciled temporarily in Algiers by the doctor's orders. A little posse of English ladies had walked up from the town to pay their respects, and displayed their stout walking-boots and short dresses in blissful unconsciousness that by presenting themselves in such a costume they were committing a solecism in good manners which nothing but a profound conviction of the utter barbarity of their nation could have induced the Duchess to pardon. These good people were soon passed on to Jeanne, who liked the English and spoke our language easily; the Duchess preferred that the place of honour beside her chair should be occupied by some more entertaining person. She enjoyed gossip, though she affected to despise it, and seldom failed to glean a large fund of amusement from her reception day. She was probably the only person in the room who did; for visits of ceremony, which are dismal affairs enough, heaven knows, in this country, are ten times worse in France; and the Duchess chose that her receptions should maintain a character of the strictest formality.

The ladies, who were grouped in the vicinity of their hosts, seldom spoke unless she addressed them; their husbands, who sat in a band at a short distance off, accurately dressed in frock-coats and varnished boots, smoothed their chimney-pot hats and conversed together in an undertone; there was no laughter; no one was, or was intended to be, quite at his ease.

It was late in the afternoon, and a good many of the Duchess's friends had already effected their escape, when a lady

was announced, at the sound of whose name all the matrons present assumed an aspect of extreme severity, while the Duchess herself became very rigid about the backbone as she rose slowly to receive her visitor.

‘How do you do, Madame de Trémonville?’ said she, extending a little, lifeless hand.

The new comer, a young and very pretty woman, dressed in the extreme of the fashion, but in perfect taste, took the stiff five fingers thus proffered to her between both her own primrose-kidded palms, and pressed them affectionately.

‘Charmed to see you looking so well, dear madame,’ she murmured, in a soft, caressing voice. ‘You grow younger—positively younger—every year.’

‘I am an old woman,’ answered the Duchess curtly; ‘but my health is tolerably good, thank God! For the rest, I did not ruin my constitution when I was young, like some people.’

‘Like me, *n’est-ce pas?* Alas! dear madame, what would you? There are some natures which require excitement, and there are others which are contented with mere existence. As for me, I must be amused. If I shorten my life, *ma foi!* so much the better: I could never endure to grow old and ugly. Ah, Madame de Vaublanc, a thousand pardons! I did not see you. Pray do not think of giving up your chair to me—well, if you insist, I will take your place beside our dear Duchess for a few minutes. She is a little deaf, you know.’

And Madame de Trémonville sank into the armchair vacated by the grim old lady to whom she had addressed herself.

Now, as the Duchess was not in the least deaf, as the chair at her side was never taken, even by her most intimate friends, except by invitation, and as its late occupant had never for a moment entertained any notion of ceding it, it will be perceived that Madame de Trémonville was a lady of considerable assurance and *aplomb*. She sank, not ungracefully, into the vacant place, and bent forward towards the Duchess in such a manner as almost to turn her back upon the rest of the company.

‘And when,’ she asked, after having monopolised the attention of her hostess during a good five minutes, to the immense disgust of the old ladies, who sat grimly and silently surveying her, ‘and when may we hope for the return of our little Marquis?’

‘It is of my godson that you speak, madame? We expect him to-day,’ answered the Duchess in her iciest tone.

‘*À la bonne heure !* He will bring us news from Paris—ah ! just heaven, how I wish I were back there !—yes ; he will have news to tell us ; and he is very *naïf* and amusing, your little Marquis. He used to honour my poor house with his company tolerably often before he went away. You know that I have the pretension to make him into a good Buonapartist.’

At the calm effrontery of this speech a thrill of horror pervaded the entire room, starting with Madame de Vaublanc, and ending with little M. Moineau, who was sitting alone near the door rubbing his nose with his gold-headed cane, and who shuddered from head to foot when the words, which were spoken rather loudly, as if in sheer bravado, reached his ear. He was himself a staunch adherent of the established government—by whose favour, indeed, he held the small appointment to which he was indebted for his daily bread—but he would no more have dared to allude to his political opinions in the presence of Madame la Duchesse than to mention the Comte de Chambord before his own chief.

The Duchess, however, showed no sign of anger, but merely replied with a slight, disdainful smile : ‘I fear you have imposed upon yourself a difficult task, madame.’

In truth the old lady did not think her antagonist worth powder and shot, and honestly believed that Madame de Trémonville belonged to a class so infinitely beneath her own as to preclude even the possibility of an encounter between them. The woman was very impertinent, certainly, but so are the *gamins* in the streets ; there is a kind of impertinence which cannot rise to the level of an affront.

But Madame de Vaublanc probably took a less lofty view of her station, for she hastened to accept the challenge which the Duchess had ignored.

‘It seems to me, madame,’ said she, in her thin, acid voice, ‘that you might well leave M. le Marquis in peace. If all that I hear is true, your house is frequented from morning to night and from night to morning by every officer in Algiers ; one young man more or less can scarcely signify to you.’

‘Oh, madame, you flatter me !’ answered Madame de Trémonville, turning round, with a pleasant smile, to face her assailant. ‘It is true that some of these gentlemen are kind enough to come, from time to time, and try to preserve me from dying of *ennui* in this horrible place ; but every officer in Algiers—oh, no ! my little villa has neither accommodation nor attractions enough for so large a society. Your friends have

exaggerated to you, dear Madame de Vaublanc. Besides, you conceive that one must have a little variety. I have the greatest possible admiration for our brave army, but I do not desire to live in a world inhabited only by soldiers. M. de Mersac, who, I assure you, honours me by his visits entirely of his own free will, amuses me sometimes, and you would not be so cruel as to wish to deprive me of any amusement I can get in this deplorable country.'

'If you do not like Algiers, why do you stay here, madame?' cried Madame de Vaublanc. 'M. de Trémonville, at least, has some reasons, I suppose, for finding it advisable to remain where he is.'

'If so, he has not communicated them to me,' returned Madame de Trémonville, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. 'As for the miserable little salary which he receives from his appointment here, you will easily believe that that can scarcely influence him. He accepted it, in the first instance, out of regard for my health, and he has continued to hold it—heaven knows why! I daresay we shall go away soon. In the meantime one endeavours to be as cheerful as one can. Why do you never join our little *réunions*, dear madame? Come without ceremony any Thursday evening; we shall be enchanted to see you; you will be the life of our party.'

At this audacious proposition Madame de Vaublanc nearly choked with anger. Madame de Trémonville was young, pretty, and had not the best of reputations. Shocking stories were told of her extravagance, of her card parties, of her flirtations. (There is no French word for flirtation, and Madame de Vaublanc qualified the lady's conduct by a less ambiguous term.) She had an indomitable courage, a perfect command of herself, and a complexion as beautiful as the best rouge and *blanc-de-perles* could make it; whereas the poor old Vaublanc was ugly, wrinkled, irreproachable, and cross, and turned of a dusky-red colour when she was angered. The combat was an unequal one, and the elder lady hastened to retire from it.

'Allow me, at least, to choose my own friends, madame,' she muttered, drumming with her foot on the floor.

'*Plait-il?*' murmured Madame de Trémonville softly, turning open eyes of innocent wonder upon the silent company.

The ungrateful old Duchess laughed, and several of the gentlemen put their hands over their mouths and stroked their moustaches reflectively.

Nobody was very fond of Madame de Vaublanc, who, like

many other virtuous people, was apt to be a little hard upon the pleasant vices of her neighbours; and some of those who had suffered from her strictures upon their conduct were not ill-pleased to see her thus publicly discomfited, although her assailant was an Imperialist, a woman of no family, and one who was only admitted upon sufferance into their coterie. Even so, when certain statesmen are attacked in Parliament, and wince under the lash, those who sit behind them may sometimes watch with perfect equanimity the tribulation of their leaders, and even quietly chuckle over the same. An occasional touch of the rod is wholesome discipline for an over-proud spirit.

Madame de Trémonville knew better than to linger too long upon the scene of her small victory. In a very few minutes she got up, took a cordial farewell of the Duchess, and swept gracefully down the room, bowing as she went to several of the company, who had risen to let her pass. Jeanne held the door open for her.

'Adieu, mademoiselle,' she said, with a fascinating smile; '*bien des choses à monsieur votre frère.*'

Whereat Jeanne bowed gravely, but vouchsafed no reply.

A torrent of shrill ejaculations followed the audacious lady's exit. 'What a woman!'—'What insolence!'—'What an impossible costume! And did you remark that she was rouged up to her eyes?'—'Decidedly one must renounce the idea of receiving these people, if they know so little how to conduct themselves.'—'To say that M. le Marquis was in the habit of visiting her—has one ever heard such impertinence! Naturally there could be no truth in what she said.'—'Oh, madame, one does not give oneself the trouble to contradict falsehoods so transparent!'—'Ah, dear Madame de Vaublanc, you did well to put her back in her proper place!'

In the midst of this indignant chorus Fanchette's withered face was thrust through the half-open door. She beckoned stealthily to Jeanne, who got up at once, and slipped unnoticed out of the room.

'Well?' she said eagerly, as soon as she had joined the old nurse in the hall.

'Well—he has arrived; he is waiting for you in the dining-room. Come here, that I may arrange your hair; you have lost half-a-dozen hair pins.'

But Jeanne, waving the old woman off, passed quickly into the dining-room, and closed the door behind her.

A tall young man was standing, with his hands in his pockets, looking out of the window and whistling softly. He whisked round at the noise of Jeanne's entrance, and showed a handsome, oval, beardless face, which broke into smiles as he embraced his sister.

'You good old Jeanne!' he cried. 'I knew you would not be long in coming after you had heard of my arrival. And how are you? And what have you been doing with yourself all these weeks? I shall make it a habit to go away oftener, that I may the oftener have the pleasure of seeing your dear old face again. You may believe me or not as you like, but it is infinitely the most beautiful face I ever saw, alive or painted.'

Jeanne laughed and sighed in a breath. 'How long will you think that, I wonder?' she said.

'As long as I live,' replied the young man with conviction. 'I flatter myself I am not a bad judge, and I assure you that there is not a woman in the world to compare with you. I am not alone in my opinion either, let me tell you.'

'I don't care what other people think of me,' she answered quickly. 'If you love me better than anyone else, that is all I want.'

'You are glad to have me back, then?'

'Glad!' Jeanne threw an emphasis into the word which ought to have satisfied her hearer. She clung to him, and kissed him again and again with a vehemence which, Frenchman as he was, disconcerted him a little. He reddened slightly, and laughed as he gently disengaged himself.

'One would think you meant to stifle me,' he said. 'What would your friends in the drawing-room say, if they could see you? They would hardly recognise the statuesque Mademoiselle de Mersac.'

'I am not Mademoiselle de Mersac to you; I am Jeanne, who is quite another person. Jeanne has many defects which are not apparent in Mademoiselle de Mersac—that of inquisitiveness amongst others. Come and sit down in the armchair and tell me all about England and the *famille* Ashley.'

Léon seated himself. 'The *famille* Ashley,' said he, with a shrug of his shoulders, 'resembles all other English families; and as for their country, I left it without any desire to see it again. All that one has read of the climate of that island is not in the least exaggerated—quite the contrary. During the whole time that I was at my uncle's house we saw the sun

twice, and even then you could hardly have distinguished him from the moon.'

'It is a bad time of the year to go to England, I suppose. But the people—what were they like?'

'Our relations you mean? *Ma foi!* it is not so easy to describe them: they are so very like all their compatriots. Figure to yourself a *bon papa anglais*, bald, rosy, stout; a mother of a family, badly dressed, rather untidy, always in a hurry; two young misses with pretty faces and fair hair, but with feet of a size that would make you shudder, and ill-fitting, one-buttoned gloves—there you have the party. The sons are away from home—in the army, in the navy—I know not where. They received me very kindly, these good people; but I did not amuse myself very well in their house. You know I have not your love for the English. I find them rude and brusque, and I do not understand the jokes at which they laugh so immoderately. I was very dull *chez mon oncle*. Twice we went to the *chasse au renard*, and they were so kind as to compliment me upon my riding; other days we shot pheasants, of which there is a great abundance in the neighbourhood; but, as my uncle has no *chasse* of his own, we could only do this by invitation, and there were several days on which I was left to be entertained by my aunt and cousins. Ah! *par exemple*, it was then that I wished myself back in Algiers. The misses are a little insipid: they visit the poor; they do a great deal of fancy work; they drink tea half the afternoon; they have not much conversation. After dinner my uncle falls asleep and snores; I play a *partie* of billiards with the ladies; and then comes the evening prayer. I, as a Catholic, am invited to retire, if the ceremony offends my prejudices. I reply that I am not a bigot, and the ladies smile upon me. Then the servants make their entry—a formidable array. The butler and the housekeeper seat themselves upon chairs; but the others, to mark the inferiority of their position, I presume, carry in a long bench, and perch themselves uncomfortably upon it; some of them appear ill at ease, and breathe noisily. My uncle puts on his spectacles and reads a chapter hastily, stumbling over the long words. Generally one of the dogs barks, and the misses titter behind their hands. When we rise from our knees everybody goes to bed, and I seek my room disconsolately, not being sleepy, and longing for tobacco. On the second night I take my courage in both hands and ask permission to smoke a cigar somewhere. My uncle,

who does not smoke himself, has no *funoir* in his establishment ; so I am led by the butler to a little dark room in the basement, where there are black-beetles. He gives me a candle and bids me good-night. It is not gay. There, my sister, you have life at Holmhurst. One day resembles another, as the clothes, the habits, the pleasures of one Englishman resemble those of another. It is a country of monotony, and there is nothing the average Englishman dreads so much as being different from his neighbours. Here and there, no doubt, there are exceptions ; and it was my good fortune to come across such a one in the person of a certain Mr. Barrington, a neighbour of the Ashleys, who, I must admit, has all the good qualities of his nation without its faults. He has travelled a great deal ; he speaks very good French ; he is without insular prejudices ; he is a rider, a shot, a dancer, an artist—in short, everything that he does he does admirably. I owe it to him that I did not perish of *ennui* at that terrible Holmhurst. He is a man altogether *hors ligne*.’

‘You are as enthusiastic as ever, Léon,’ remarked Jeanne, smiling. ‘You can praise no one by halves.’

‘Oh, as for that, everybody joins in praising Mr. Barrington ! They rave about him in his province ; and as he has a nice little property of his own and has no near relations, I leave you to guess whether the young ladies of the neighbourhood look upon him with favourable eyes. I think even that the eldest of the Ashley misses would willingly consent to make his happiness. But he has assured me that he means to remain a bachelor for the present ; he is not the man to marry *la première venue*.’

‘It seems that he appreciates his own value—your friend.’

‘Not at all ; he is the most modest man in the world. For the rest, you will probably see him to-morrow, and will be able to judge for yourself.’

‘What ? Is he here, then ?’ asked Jeanne, in some surprise.

Léon nodded. ‘He generally goes abroad for a month or two at this time of the year ; and as he had never been in Algeria I easily persuaded him to accompany me home. I am sure he will please you—even you, who detest all men. *Tenez*, he has this advantage, Mr. Barrington—that, being a heretic, the Duchess cannot wish you to marry him.’

‘Certainly that is a point in his favour,’ observed Jeanne, gravely. ‘And where have you left this paragon ?’

‘At the Hôtel d’Orient. It was there that I met Saint-Luc; and I thought it a good opportunity to introduce him to Mr. Barrington, who might have found it a little dull, having no friends in the place.’

‘So that was the reason of your staying to breakfast with M. de Saint-Luc? And I was so unjust as to blame you for not coming home immediately,’ said Jeanne, with much contrition. ‘I might have known that you would not remain away for your own pleasure.’

Léon laughed a little uneasily. He was very young, and had an intermittent conscience, which asserted itself now and then—not always at the most appropriate times.

‘I wanted to see Saint-Luc on my own account, also,’ he confessed; ‘I had a note from him, while I was away, about the grey horse which he wished to buy of me; and I have the pleasure to announce to you that I have now disposed of that valuable animal on very favourable terms.’

‘The grey is a little gone in both fore-legs; M. de Saint-Luc knows that very well,’ said Jeanne quickly.

‘That has not prevented him from giving me his little brown ponies in exchange for him,’ replied Léon, with modest triumph. ‘It is not a bad bargain, is it? Saint-Luc told me you had driven them once, and were delighted with them.’

‘You cannot dispose of the grey upon those terms,’ said Jeanne decisively. ‘M. de Saint-Luc must be perfectly well aware that the grey is not worth as much as one of his ponies.’

‘That may or may not be; but it was he who suggested the exchange.’

‘Naturally; I never imagined that you would have proposed anything so absurd. The affair is not difficult to understand. M. de Saint-Luc has probably his reasons for wishing to be agreeable to you, and therefore he offers you his ponies at less than half their proper price. It is the purest impertinence.’

‘It is a pleasant form of impertinence at least,’ returned Léon, laughing. ‘*Parbleu!* I wish a few other people would take it into their heads to be impertinent in the same way.’

‘You do not understand,’ said Jeanne, in great vexation. ‘Do you not see that M. de Saint-Luc is making you a present?’

‘No, I don’t,’ answered Léon; ‘I don’t see it at all. A horse is not like a measure of oats or corn; you can’t put a definite price upon him and say, “That is his real actual value in the market.” Saint-Luc has taken a fancy to the grey, and is determined to have him. I may think this or that about the

horse ; and you say he is weak in his fore-legs—an opinion which may possibly be a mistaken one ; but Saint-Luc has had plenty of opportunities of judging for himself as to that. If a man offers me a certain price for a certain article, am I bound to tell him that, in my idea, he is bidding too highly ? Believe me, my dear Jeanne, in this wicked world every man looks after his own interests ; and as for what you say about the giving of presents, I never yet heard of an instance of a present being given in the way you suggest. People who give presents like to be thanked for them, I can assure you ; and ——’

‘Madame la Duchesse sends to inform M. le Marquis that she waits him in the *salon*,’ said a servant, putting in his head at this juncture ; and so the remainder of Léon’s harangue upon the way of the world remained unspoken.

The truth was that the young man attributed to his own acuteness the unquestionable fact that he had concluded an excellent bargain ; and was, consequently, neither more nor less pleased with himself than the generality of his elders would have been in a similar case.

CHAPTER IV

MR. BARRINGTON.

MR. BARRINGTON, making his way leisurely up the steep streets of the Arab town on the day following that of his arrival in Algiers, and observing, with eyes appreciative of colour and outline, a hundred perfect little pictures of Oriental life as he went, marvelled greatly that it had never occurred to him before to visit so charming a city. Mr. Barrington was an amateur artist, and therefore, of course, even more prone to the discovery of picturesque effects than a professional wielder of the brush and maulstick. The high white houses that rose on either side of the narrow street—windowless generally, or at most with but a small grated aperture or two close under the overhanging roof ; the projecting wooden buttresses that flung long blue shadows upon the whitewash ; the broad glossy-leaved bananas and sombre cypresses that reared their heads, here and there, above the walls, suggesting visions of cool courtyards and luxurious Eastern interiors to the artistic mind ; the tiny shops—mere recesses in the wall—whose owners sat cross-

legged smoking their long pipes, in apparently absolute indifference to the sale of their wares—all these were to him novel and delightful sights. Overhead, the strip of sky was of a deep melting blue; the sun caught the upper part of the houses, but left the basements in deep shadow; before him the street trended upwards in broad shallow steps, down which all sorts of queerly-costumed figures came to meet him. Now it was a grave, majestic Moor, his burnous thrown over his shoulder and displaying his gay-coloured jacket and ample nether garments; now a grey-bearded Jew shrinking along close to the wall in the cat-like way peculiar to his race; now a Mauresque, enveloped in fold upon fold of white, her black eyes gleaming through her yashmak; now a stalwart negress in blue and white checked haik. Mr. Barrington surveyed them all with benevolent approbation. Indeed, the habitual expression of this young man's features was one of good-humoured patronage. The world had always treated him so well that the least he could do was to smile back upon it; and from his childhood he had had so much of his own way, and rough places had been made so smooth for him, that it was scarcely strange if he looked upon most men and things from an imaginary standpoint rather above than below them.

Left an orphan almost in his infancy, he had been brought up by a small junta of uncles and aunts who had done their best to spoil him, and who, to his mind, had very efficiently replaced the parents whom he could scarcely remember; and upon attaining his majority he had stepped into a comfortable property, together with a fortune not so large as to be embarrassing, yet large enough to make him what most people would consider a rich man. He was now about thirty years of age, and had never known an ache or a pain, a care or a sorrow, worth speaking of, in his life. Without having any special title to beauty of feature, he was nevertheless pleasant to look upon, having big bones, well-developed muscles, and perfect health. He was the incarnation of prosperity and contentment. Crossing-sweepers approached him with confidence; and when he took his place upon the magisterial bench the heart of the poacher rejoiced. As a good landlord, a good sportsman, a tolerable linguist, and a lover of the arts, he had claims upon the sympathies of various classes of society; and in fact few men could have enjoyed a larger acquaintance or a more widely-spread popularity than he. He made friends with everybody. He had made friends with Léon, he had made friends already

with M. de Saint-Luc, and he was now on his way to call at the Campagne de Mersac and make friends with the young lady of whom he had received a description from her brother which had somewhat excited his curiosity. He had none of the shyness with which many Englishmen are afflicted, experience having taught him to look for a hearty welcome wherever he went; nor had he any disturbing doubts as to the nature of his reception in this particular instance.

Emerging from the tortuous streets of the Arab town, and passing through the Kasbah, or citadel, in which it culminates, to the open country beyond, he turned—not to take breath—he was too sound, wind and limb, to require any such respite—but to feast his eyes upon the glorious prospect that lay beneath him.

‘Good heavens!’ he muttered, ‘what a queer, uneven business life is, and how few people ever get a chance of knowing the beauty of the world they live in! How I should like to turn a whole town-full of factory hands out here for a day or two!’

A drove of little donkeys, laden with sacks of earth, came pattering down the road behind him, their driver, clothed in ragged sackcloth, seated sideways very close to the tail of the last of them, and swinging his bronze legs while he urged on his charges with guttural cries.

‘Now look at that fellow,’ moralised Barrington. ‘Thousands in London, not a bit worse off than he, are leading lives of the most utter and hopeless misery; and as for him, he looks as jolly as a sandboy—by Jove! he *is* a sandboy, or at least an earthboy, which, I suppose, is much the same—odd thing that! Yes, there you have the effect of air and sunshine. Well, one can’t ship all St. Giles’s over here; and perhaps Bushey Park would be more in their line, after all.’

Consoled by this reflection, he pulled out of his pocket the note-book which, like a man of method as he was, he always carried about him, and noted down: ‘*Mem.* Send cheque to Drudgett to give poor people a day in the country when warm weather comes.’—Drudgett being a hard-working parson in an East London parish. After which he resumed his walk.

His charity was mostly of this kind. It did not cost him very much; but it was not, on that account, the less welcome, and it had earned him a name for benevolence which extended beyond the limits of his own county.

Mr. Barrington, although he had mixed a good deal with

foreigners, and prided himself upon nothing so much as his cosmopolitan character, had all an Englishman's dislike to asking his way. He therefore made several unnecessary circuits, and presented himself at the doors of two villas before he discovered the one of which he was in search.

'M. le Marquis was out,' the servant said, who answered his ring; 'but Madame la Duchesse was at home. Would monsieur give himself the trouble to enter?'

Monsieur consented willingly. He was always ready to make fresh acquaintances; and though he had not the remotest idea of who Madame la Duchesse might be, he was not at all reluctant to introduce himself to her.

'Presumably an elderly relative of our young friend,' he thought, as he followed the servant across the hall, and heard himself announced as 'M. de Barainton.'

The Duchess, on her side, knew perfectly well who her visitor was, having heard all about him from Léon on the previous evening; but, for all that, it did not suit her to manifest any immediate recognition of the stranger's identity. She had always been a very punctilious person, even in the days of her supremacy in Paris, and was tenfold more so in these latter times, when there seemed to be occasional danger of her claims to veneration being ignored.

Nor was she over-well pleased by the easy, unembarrassed manner in which Mr. Barrington introduced himself, explained the origin of his acquaintance with her godson, and, seating himself beside her, entered at once into conversation in free and fluent French. She had often complained of English *garucherie*; but, at the bottom of her heart, she thought a little timidity on entering her presence not out of place in a young man. So, for once in his life, Mr. Barrington failed to make a favourable impression.

Some extracts from a rather lengthy epistle which he despatched a few days later to a friend in England may be appropriately inserted here:—

'That old Duchesse de Breuil was a charming study; I never met with a more perfect type of a great lady of the *vieille roche*. She has a fine hook nose, and faded, sunken blue eyes; her hair is as white as snow—just as it ought to be; she wore a dress of stone-grey silk so rich, and at the same time so soft, that I would have asked her where she got it if I had not been afraid; and her withered old neck and wrists were half-concealed by clouds of old yellow Mechlin lace. I don't think

very old people can ever be beautiful, looked upon as human beings; but they may undoubtedly be beautiful as pictures; and this dear old soul, sitting bolt upright in her armchair by the fireplace, holding up a huge black fan to shield her from the blaze, was quite a gem in her way. I could have sat and looked at her with perfect contentment for half an hour; only the bother was one had to talk, and, for some reason or other, she didn't choose to exert her conversational powers. I was just beginning to feel rather bored, and was thinking about taking my leave, when the door opened and in walked—the goddess Minerva. Pallas-Athenè herself, I give you my word—in a brown holland gown—and, oh! how I wished the fashions of this inartistic age had permitted her to wear her ancient costume of sleeveless tunic, peplus, helmet, and lance! Her modern name is Mademoiselle Jeanne de Mersac; and she held out her hand to me and began talking in a grave, condescending sort of way about England and her cousins the Ashleys, just as if she had been an ordinary mortal. Her voice was very soft and musical—rather deep for a woman; but that is no defect. I called her Pallas-Athenè because she is so tall and proud and cold; but she is not γλαυκῶπις; on the contrary, her eyes are large, brown, and soft, like Juno's, and she is as graceful as the Venus Anadyomene, and as free and stately in her gait as Diana the huntress. So you see she is altogether divine. There was a time when I must have fallen head over ears in love with her on the spot; but you and I, old man, have left that era behind us. *Militavi non sine gloriâ.* I have gone through a fair share of flirtations in my day, and have had one or two narrow shaves of matrimony; now I am grown tough with years about the region of the heart, and can worship beauty from a purely æsthetic point of view, and without *arrière pensée*. I am too old a bird to fall unwarily into the meshes of the fowler. Not that I mean to insinuate that Mademoiselle de Mersac is spreading a net for me, which will, I know, be the first idea to suggest itself to your coarse mind. Heaven forbid! I am blushing all over, as I write, at the bare thought of such profanity. Mademoiselle de Mersac has no need to angle for a husband. She might marry anybody, and has already refused many brilliant offers, giving it to be understood, I believe, that her intention is to remain unmarried, in order that she may be the freer to give herself up to the care of her brother, who is a decent young fellow enough, but is all the better, I daresay, for having a protecting goddess to warn him

off from occasional dangers, such as harpies, sirens, and so forth. It certainly seems possible that, being now come to years of discretion, he may soon find a sister's supervision superfluous; and it is also not unlikely that Mademoiselle Jeanne may eventually see fit to modify the programme she has laid down for herself; but in the meantime the spectacle of a woman who really does not want to get married is a novel and refreshing one. You, who go in for cynicism of a more or less shallow kind, and who think yourself clever for discovering a selfish motive at the root of all your neighbour's actions, should be the first to admit this.

'The picturesque old Duchess, who is worldly-wise and experienced, is racking her wits and breaking her heart in the effort to "establish" Mademoiselle Jeanne; but as yet she has only succeeded in inspiring the young lady with a profound mistrust of, and prejudice against, all members of the male sex. This, of course, you don't believe; but I can't help that. Mademoiselle is charitable and visits the poor, Arab and Christian alike; but her good deeds are mostly done *sub rosa*—just what I should have expected of her. She is kind and generous to poor, timid, or ugly people; but a little inclined to be haughty towards those with whom the world goes well—there again I recognise the character which I was sure from the first must go with so superb a physique. By the poor she is adored, but she is less popular among her equals. Few people understand her; some dislike her; but all admire her. There is a prevalent notion that when her brother marries she will take the veil.

'The greater part of this information I have gleaned from a certain Vicomte de Saint-Luc, who is staying at this hotel—a half-ruined Parisian of the new school, who gets his clothes from an English tailor, rides in steeple-chases at Vincennes, plays baccarat all night, and sleeps all day. You know the kind of man—or rather, on second thoughts, you probably don't; but I do, and it is not a type that I much admire. I suspect him of being somewhat *épris* of Mademoiselle, or her fortune—she *has* a fortune of her own, by the by—but I don't imagine he has much chance of success. He is going to sell me a horse; and I daresay he will try to get the better of me. I flatter myself he won't find that a particularly easy task.

'Well, after all I have said about this divine Mademoiselle de Mersac, you will understand, without my telling you, that I shall never be content till I have got her to sit to me. The question is, in what pose and surroundings to take her. In

her garden there is a little fountain which splashes lazily into a marble basin where there are water-lilies. All round it are standard rose-trees; and for background you have a row of black cypresses, with the blue sky showing between and above them. I thought of painting her standing there, dressed all in white, with perhaps a pomegranate blossom in her hair, and looking out upon you from the frame with her great solemn eyes. But then, again, I don't know that I should not like her better half-reclining on a low divan—there are several such in the De Mersacs' drawing-room—with a panther-skin at her feet, and a hand-screen made of a palmetto-leaf in her hand. Over the back of the couch one would throw one of those Arab rugs that they make at Tlemcen, in which all the colours of the rainbow, and a great many more, meet, but never "swear." There would be a glimpse of sharp-pointed arches and clustered marble pillars for background; and the light would fall from above. But the fact is, that she would look well in any posture; and I can't imagine a situation that would be unbecoming to her.

'Of course I have not had the audacity to broach the subject yet; nor shall I, until we have become a good deal better acquainted than we are at present. However, as I am determined that the picture shall be painted, I haven't much doubt as to my ultimate success; and, indeed, Mademoiselle was very gracious to me—more so, I believe, than she is to the generality of visitors. Saint-Luc says this is because I am not a possible suitor; and that if I had been a Frenchman she would not have troubled herself to address two words to me. I don't know how this may be; but, at all events, I think I may congratulate myself upon having made some advance towards intimacy in the course of my first interview. It was rather uphill work at starting; but I exerted all my powers to be amusing, and at length I succeeded in making her laugh a little, which was a great point gained. Even the old Duchess thawed when she found that I was acquainted with some of her friends in the Faubourg, and was good enough to entertain me with some long yarns about Talleyrand and Polignac and the Duchesse de Berri. Then young De Mersac came in and offered to drive me home; and so I took my leave. We rattled down to the town at no end of a pace—the way these Frenchmen drive down hill is a caution!—but we arrived without broken bones at the hotel, where we found M. de Saint-Luc; and presently my young friend and he went off to dine together somewhere.

They were so kind as to invite me to join them ; but as I heard something about *baccarat*, and as that is a game which I have played in Paris, *consule Planco*, and don't mean to play again, except perhaps in the company of sober folks like you, I excused myself, and dined at the *table-d'hôte*. We had green peas at dinner, and this morning they brought me bananas and strawberries, and the most delicious little mandarin oranges, with my breakfast. I am writing by my open window, and it is so hot that I have had to close the outside shutters. And the last thing you said to me before I left was, that you couldn't understand a fellow going out of England before the hunting was over ! Gracious powers ! aren't oranges, and bananas, and sunshine, and Mademoiselle de Mersac worth six weeks of in-different hunting ? I enjoy a good day's sport as much as anybody, but, thank heaven ! I can enjoy other things as well. Most men lose half the pleasures of life because they will select one pursuit and stick to it ; it is the greatest mistake in the world. Now, I——'

Here the letter proceeds to treat discursively of various topics, and ceases to have any bearing upon matters connected with the present history.

CHAPTER V.

M. DE SAINT LUC.

CHARLES CASIMIR LOUIS, Vicomte de Saint-Luc, had, for more years than he cared accurately to reckon up, enjoyed a considerable amount of notoriety and admiration in the gay world of Paris. A member of the Jockey Club, a duellist of proved skill and intrepidity, a leader of cotillons in the most fashionable salons, a bold gamester, and an imperturbable loser, he seemed to have fulfilled all the conditions necessary to being considered a fine gentleman by the *habitués* of the society which he frequented. Among the *ignobile vulgus*, too, which, in France even more than in England, is liable to be dazzled by profusion, glitter, and display, his name had become a familiar word ; nor did his well-known colours ever fail to elicit applause at Longchamps, La Marche, or Vincennes, especially when, as was often the case, the noble owner was himself the wearer of them.

M. de Saint-Luc had begun life as a sub-lieutenant in the Chasseurs d'Afrique, in which distinguished corps he had risen to the rank of captain before the death of his father, a quiet old gentleman, the greater part of whose life had been spent parsimoniously upon his estate in Normandy, placed him in command of a very respectable fortune.

The young Vicomte, to whom a vast supply of ready money was an altogether new and delightful sensation, immediately abandoned his military career, took a commodious flat in the Chaussée d'Antin, and set to work to enjoy life in Paris, where his handsome face, his lively manners, and his superb indifference to expenditure soon made him a prime favourite with both sexes. In a very short time he had achieved a reputation. A few duels, a cleverly-won race or two, and a suspicion of sundry *bonnes fortunes* sufficed to place him very near to the highest eminence of fame attainable by those who lived the life which he had adopted. All the opera-glasses in the house were brought to bear upon him when he lounged into his place at the Italiens or the Français; he could not walk a hundred yards from his door without becoming aware that the passers-by were nudging one another and whispering his name; the horrible little newspapers, which busy themselves with such subjects, chronicled his extravagances, and called upon their readers to admire his freaks; provincials gaped at him; fine ladies ogled him; he was envied by his inferiors, and emulated by his equals. At the time of the Exhibition of 1867, though at that time he was already a little past the zenith of his glory, he was pointed out to foreigners as a worthy representative of high life under the Second Empire. It was, perhaps, no great honour to be thus distinguished; but, such as it was, hundreds of Parisians would have given their ears to share it. As the times are, so will the men be; and the times just then were bad, in more ways than one. An idle Englishman, with a sufficiency of money in his pocket, may, and from the nature of his position probably will, succeed in leading a life which, if not profitable, is, at any rate, in a great measure healthy and manly, even if he have no higher object before him than pleasure; but the resources of a Frenchman, similarly situated, are far more restricted, and seldom extend beyond the walls of a town. To rise at mid-day, to dawdle through the afternoon in paying visits or driving in the Bois, to look in at the theatre or at a ball during the evening, and to devote the rest of the twenty-four hours to gambling, may not seem a specially inviting programme

to look forward to for the remainder of a man's days; such, however, in so far as it is possible to indicate it here, was the mode of killing time chosen by M. de Saint-Luc and his friends, and very few of them were ever heard to complain of it. Habit, which renders most things supportable—else, where could you find coal-miners, stokers, or dentists?—had so inured these gentlemen to their manner of life that most of them really believed their lot to be an enviable one.

To do the Vicomte justice, such was not his opinion. After three or four years of Parisian life he became heartily sick of the whole business. He grew tired of astonishing people, and ceased to care in the least whether they were astonished or not. He wearied of the eternal mill-round of so-called pleasure, and longed to escape from it, without very well seeing his way to do so. In cards only he found some remnant of excitement; but then the cards were not always propitious, and, as his income dwindled, he began to think that they also were vanity. Wandering home forlornly, in the grey morning, with empty pockets, an aching head, grimy hands, and an utter distaste and disgust for the world, he not unfrequently asked himself whether it would not be best to put a pistol to his head, and have done with it. Generally he answered the question in the affirmative; but there he stopped. 'One has always plenty of time to kill oneself,' he would reflect as he tumbled into bed; and the next evening saw him seated before the card-table again as usual.

So time went on, and symptoms of crow's-feet began to manifest themselves about the corners of M. de Saint-Luc's eyes, and a grey hair or two cropped up about the region of his temples, and with each succeeding year his banker's book became a less agreeable study. How long he might have maintained his position in the front rank of Parisian society if his horse had come in first for the Grand Prix of 1869 it is impossible to say; but it was M. Lupin's Glaneur who won the race, and our poor Vicomte drove home, down the crowded Champs Elysées, with a face somewhat graver than usual, and an uncomfortable suspicion that he was very nearly ruined. He looked into his affairs with an ultimate result less discouraging than he had ventured to hope for. He found that after paying all outstanding debts, and disposing of his stud and other superfluities, there would remain to him an income sufficient for moderate comfort, besides his château and estates in Normandy. This Norman château, which he had hitherto visited barely once a year during the shooting season, should henceforth, he

determined, be his home. He had been one of the bright particular stars of the Parisian firmament, and preferred extinction to diminished shining as an indistinguishable member of the *nebulæ* which had once surrounded him.

One fine day in the end of June, therefore, the Vicomte de Saint-Luc might have been seen taking his ticket at the station of Saint-Lazare, while his servant watched over a pile of luggage whose imposing dimensions sufficiently showed that its owner was bound upon no ordinary pleasure-trip. '*Adieu, Paris ; adieu, nos beaux jours !*' muttered the Vicomte, as he installed himself in a corner of the railway carriage.

In thus turning his back upon old associations M. de Saint-Luc had, as a matter of course, contemplated marriage as an essential part of his scheme for the future. He did not much want to be married, but that was not the question. To live in the country as a bachelor would be insupportable ; besides, it was the recognised thing that a landed proprietor should marry after a certain age. He had heroically resolved to abandon pleasure in favour of dull respectability, and a wife and children were among the lesser evils which he anticipated from the change. But before he had been a day in the home of his fathers he perceived the impossibility of asking any lady to share it with him while in its present condition, and fully realised how necessary it was that the future Vicomtesse should have her share of this world's gear.

M. de Saint-Luc's château was situated, not in that sunshiny, apple-bearing, prosperous Normandy so familiar to English tourists, but in the less frequented and bleaker district which forms the north-western extremity of the province. With its steep roofs and its wrought-iron balconies, it was a sufficiently picturesque object in the landscape, and the woods which surrounded it looked doubly green, cool, and leafy by contrast with the heathy moorland which stretched away from them to the seaward. But then picturesqueness and comfort are so seldom allied. The house was cold, damp, and mildewed ; it had been uninhabited, so far at least as its *salons* and best bedrooms were concerned, for many years, and the rats, the mice, and the moths had had it all their own way with the furniture. As for the domain, that was well enough in fine summer weather. The neglected garden, the moss grown sundial, the broken statues, the marble balustrades stained with the rain and snow of many winters, the pond where the ancient carp were, the dense woods and the long grassy avenues that intersected them—all these

had a peaceful dignified repose not unpleasing to a jaded Parisian. There was a charm, too, in the healthy freedom of the moors, where a salt-laden wind always blew freshly, where you might gallop for leagues without injuring anybody's crops, and where a gentleman who had won steeple-chases in his time might indulge himself occasionally by popping over a stone wall. It was in this way that M. de Saint-Luc employed the greater portion of his days, his rides not unfrequently terminating at the neighbouring château of M. de Marcigny, whose charming wife—a lady of fashion, whom Saint-Luc had known ever since he had known fashionable society at all—had charged herself with the delicate task of finding a suitable mate for the reformed Vicomte.

He got through the summer satisfactorily enough, on the whole, though not without occasional hankerings after the flesh-pots of Egypt; but his heart began to sink with the fall of the leaf, and early in October his courage failed him altogether. For then the mighty south-west wind arose in his strength, and roaring in day after day from the Atlantic, with pelting rain and driving mist, stripped the tossing boughs, whistled through the ill-fitting windows of the château, and finally sent the Vicomte to bed with such a cold and cough as he had never had before in his life. The days were bad enough, but the nights were simply appalling. When the old woman who officiated as his housekeeper had brought him his *lait-de-poule*, and stolen away after wishing him good-night, Saint-Luc could not sleep for the awful and unaccountable noises that became audible in the deserted corridors. Such ghostly rustlings and moanings, such a weird, nameless stirring, reached his ears from the unoccupied rooms that he was fain to slip out of bed and lock his door. Every now and again a gust of wind whirled away a loose slate from the roof with crash and clatter.

On the third day Saint-Luc got up and dressed himself, vowing that he could not and would not stand this any longer. He ordered his horse and galloped off through the rain to see Madame de Marcigny, whom he found packing up her trunks.

'What, madame, do you, too, desert us?' he exclaimed in dismay.

'We leave for Paris to-morrow,' she answered; 'I adore the country, but I detest bad weather; and I see by your face that you share my opinion. You know I always told you you would renounce your project of living in Normandy from January to December.'

‘You were right, madame, as you always are. I renounce everything—château, wife, respectability—all ! I have the *mal du pays*. What the Ranz des Vaches is to the Swiss, and the *cornemuse* to the Scot, that is the asphalte of Paris to me. A whiff of it would bring the tears into my eyes. Only as I have sworn never to live in Paris again, I think I will spend my winter at Nice. There, at last, I shall meet friends ; I shall perhaps get rid of this cough which is shaking me to pieces, and I can finish ruining myself pleasantly at Monaco.’

‘If I were you, my friend,’ said Madame de Marcigny gravely, ‘I would remain away from Monaco.’

‘Your advice is excellent, madame,’ answered Saint-Luc, with a smile and a bow ; ‘but, unhappily, I know myself too well to imagine that I shall have the fortitude to follow it. If I go to Nice, you may be sure that M. Blanc will profit by my residence in the South.’

Madame de Marcigny considered.

‘Then do not go to Nice,’ she said at length. ‘Go rather to Algiers. You will be at home there—you who have served in the Chasseurs d’Afrique and fought against Abd-el-Kader ; you will find a charming climate and an agreeable society ; and, what is best of all, you will make acquaintance with Mademoiselle de Mersac.’

‘And who is Mademoiselle de Mersac, if you please ?’

‘Well, I cannot tell you much about her, except that she is young, well provided for and exceptionally beautiful, and that she is the niece—or some other relation—of my old friend the Duchesse de Breuil, who is anxious to establish her, and to whom I will give you an introduction. It seems to me that she may be worth the trouble of a journey to Algeria.’

Thus it came about that M. de Saint-Luc presented himself one day at the Campagne de Mersac, and was received by the Duchess with the friendliness due to a gentleman of ancient lineage and a *protégé* of Madame de Marcigny. He was not disinclined to marry the young lady whose advantages had been enumerated to him as above recorded—or indeed any young lady equally eligible ; but he felt no enthusiasm or interest about her, and certainly had no suspicion of the influence that she was destined to exercise upon his future life. At what age, and after how much experience, dare a man consider himself superior to the absurd passion of love at first sight ? Saint-Luc, whose amours had been so many that he had forgotten three-fourths of them, and who could no longer be called a young man except

by courtesy, might perhaps, without undue arrogance, have smiled at the notion that he could be assailed by any such malady; yet after he had passed a quarter of an hour in the same room with Jeanne de Mersac and had exchanged half a dozen sentences with her, he returned to his hotel conscious of a singular inward change, and at the end of a week was fain to admit to himself, not without consternation, that, for the first time in his life, he was really in love. He was half happy, half vexed, at the discovery. It was not displeasing to him as a man whose lease of existence, according to the Biblical standard, had already run into its second term, to find that some remnant of the freshness of youth still clung to him; but on the other hand, it was a little ridiculous to lose one's heart to a beautiful face, like a raw boy from Saint-Cyr. Moreover, it is inconvenient to be in love with your wife. Great passions do not suit with domesticity, or so at least the Vicomte thought. However, whether for good or for evil, this strange thing had befallen him, and could not be striven against, so he lost no time in adopting what he believed to be the proper line of conduct in such circumstances. He went to the Duchess, announced his desire, and laid before her an estimate of his income as nearly correct as he could make it. He was met with a reply which somewhat staggered him.

'As far as I am concerned,' the Duchess said, 'I should be charmed if this alliance could be arranged; but, unhappily, the decision rests neither with me nor with the young Marquis, but with Jeanne herself. It is absurd, it is unreasonable, but it is so. My poor friend, the late Marquis, took it into his head to marry an Englishwoman, from whom he imbibed I know not what fantastic notions, which, among other results, have had that of causing me an immensity of annoyance and trouble.' Here the Duchess expatiated at some length upon the inconvenience occasioned to her by Jeanne's independence of authority. '*Il vous faudra lui faire la cour, monsieur,*' she concluded, spreading out her hands and raising her shoulders. 'It is a troublesome process if you will—I am not sure that it is even *convenable*; but it is the only way that I know of to gain her for your wife. Nothing that I can say will influence her in the least—that I can promise you; but you have my best wishes. You see I treat you with perfect frankness: if you think the prize is not worth the time and exertion it will cost you (and I warn you in advance that you will have to expend a great deal of both, and also a large supply of patience), I shall not be astonished.'

Saint-Luc answered, with a smile, that if nothing more than labour and patience were demanded of him, these should not be wanting on his part. He did not allow the Duchess to suppose that he entertained any warmer feeling for Mademoiselle de Mersac than that safe one of esteem which Frenchmen consider the surest basis of matrimonial felicity ; but he secretly rejoiced in the prospect of winning so beautiful a bride by some more romantic method than that which had at first suggested itself to him, and perhaps thought the task would not prove so difficult a one as the old lady seemed to anticipate.

If he did deem success a probability he was not wholly inexcusable in so thinking. Fortune had smiled so persistently upon him in all his previous *affaires de cœur* that he was entitled, without inordinate vanity, to consider himself a favourite with the fair sex. Was it likely that he who had known how to please the great ladies of Paris would fail with an inexperienced girl whose life had been passed in remote Algeria ? Of course, as a matter of fact, nothing was more likely—inexperienced girls being usually far more exacting than women of the world, and the qualities which find favour in the eyes of the latter class being seldom those which recommend themselves to the former ; but this Saint-Luc did not know. His acquaintance with feminine nature was, indeed, far more restricted than he had supposed, and so he was fain to admit in the very initiation of his courtship. Advancing to the attack with easy confidence in his time-honoured system of tactics, he fell back, dismayed and bewildered, from the wall of icy impassibility behind which Jeanne entrenched herself. He had wit enough to perceive that his old weapons—compliments, killing glances, and small attentions—would be of little service to him here, but he did not see what efficient substitutes he could find for them. A passing remark of Jeanne's gave him a clue. Speaking of an old man whom everybody disliked, she said, ' He is not perfect ; but, for all that, I will allow no one to speak against him before me. He was kind to Léon once, and whoever does Léon a kindness does one to me.' M. de Saint-Luc immediately resolved that he would cultivate Léon's acquaintance. It was not a happy inspiration. With the most innocent intentions in the world, he took to inviting the young man often to dine with him at his hotel ; but the young man liked a game of cards, at the officers' club or elsewhere, after his dinner ; and what could be more natural than that his entertainer should join in the amusement ? So Léon generally got to bed at a much later hour than

was good for one whose avocations necessitated early rising; and Jeanne, discovering, without difficulty, the manner in which her brother's evenings were spent, set down the poor Vicomte as a corrupter of youth. She made a few inquiries about M. de Saint-Luc, and learned enough of his past career to confirm her bad opinion of him. Never prone to conceal her likes and dislikes, she now began to treat her unlucky admirer with a mixture of scorn and anger which must have disgusted him with her had he not been so very much in love. As it was, his passion was increased rather than diminished by Jeanne's harshness, though she often made him wince by her sharp speeches. She never lost an opportunity of snubbing him, and seemed to delight in causing him pain or humiliation; but he bore it all meekly enough, telling himself that by gentleness and perseverance he might conquer in the long run. Meanwhile he continued to be very civil to Léon, little supposing that by so doing he was injuring his own cause.

His chief object, indeed, in asking the young man to dinner was to have an excuse for talking about Jeanne—a subject upon which the latter was always ready to dilate with enthusiasm; but as for Léon, it is to be feared that baccarat and lansquenet, not Saint-Luc's society, were the attractions that led him, night after night, to the Hôtel d'Orient.

'Don't let us waste any more time out here,' he said, one evening shortly after his return, when he had been dining with Saint-Luc as usual, and the pair were leaning over the parapet of the Boulevard de l'Impératrice, smoking their cigars in the moonlight. 'Doncourt and Delamarre and the rest must have been expecting us this last half-hour.'

It was a still, warm, cloudless night. The great white mosque in the Place du Gouvernement, the lighthouse at the end of the Mole, the silent ships in the harbour, and the gently heaving sea beyond, lay bathed in such a soft brilliant moonlight as we, in these Northern latitudes, have no knowledge of. The broad boulevard was thronged with loungers, Jew, Turk, and Christian; and in one of the cafés down by the waterside somebody was singing to the tinkling accompaniment of a guitar.

'Let them expect us a little longer,' answered Saint-Luc; 'one can lose one's money any night of the year, but one cannot always have fine weather. Here comes your English friend; let us ask him what he thinks. Mr. Barrington, is it not better to sit out here doing nothing than to spend the night over a

card-table in an atmosphere laden with the fumes of bad cigars?’

‘A great deal better, I should say,’ replied Barrington, with a quick glance of distrust at Saint-Luc and of commiseration at Léon, which did not escape the notice of either of them. ‘Take my advice, De Mersac, and don’t play for high stakes; it is very nearly as exciting to play for *sous*, if you only knew it. For my own part, I gave up loo and lansquenet, and such games, years ago.’

‘*M. Barrington a passé par là*,’ said Léon, with a laugh, which imperfectly concealed some natural annoyance at being lectured; ‘he has tasted all the forbidden pleasures, and found them worthless. As for me, I suppose I am not old enough or wise enough to give up cards.’

‘And I,’ remarked Saint-Luc, ‘am too old. Life has not so many amusements that I can afford to sacrifice one of them; unless, indeed, I could discover some equivalent,’ he added, with a half-sigh.

‘Equivalent!’ echoed Barrington, rather scornfully. ‘I don’t know what your idea of an equivalent for gambling may be; but if you only look upon it as a means of making time pass, it ought not to be a hard matter to find some substitute for it.’

‘Everybody has not your talents, monsieur,’ returned Saint-Luc. ‘You have art to fall back upon, which I, unfortunately, have not.’

‘Oh, I don’t pretend to any talent,’ said Barrington generously. ‘Anybody who is not colour-blind can learn to paint well enough to make an amusement for himself with a little study and perseverance; and, if he have no turn for drawing, he can easily take up something else. The world is full of pleasant occupations, if idle people would only take the trouble to look for them.’

Saint-Luc did not dispute the accuracy of the statement. He smiled, lighted a second cigar, and puffed at it in silence for a few minutes; then, ‘Do you go to Madame de Trémonville’s dance to-morrow, Léon?’ he asked.

‘Undoubtedly; and you?’

‘I hardly know; it will depend upon how I may feel disposed when the time comes. She wearies me, this Madame de Trémonville, whom you admire so much. Has she sent an invitation to Madame la Duchesse, and your sister?’

Léon laughed. ‘Madame de Trémonville does not want courage,’ he said, ‘but she has not yet had the audacity to ask

the Duchess to one of her dances. I have been begged to bring Jeanne, though.'

'And will she go?'

'Ah! that I can't say. She is a little capricious, as all women are, even the best of them,' said Léon, who flattered himself that he had some acquaintance with this subject. 'Will you accompany us, Mr. Barrington? It may amuse you to have a glimpse of our Algerian society.'

'I don't know the lady,' answered Barrington.

'Oh! that is of no consequence; she will be delighted to receive any friend of mine. Shall I ask her to send you a card?'

'Thank you. I should like very much to go, especially if I am to have the pleasure of meeting Mademoiselle de Mersac. She did not say anything about it this morning.'

Saint-Luc stared. He had known Mademoiselle de Mersac much longer than this Englishman, but it had never occurred to him to take the liberty of calling upon her on any other day than that on which she was accustomed to receive visitors; still less would he have dreamt of entering her presence before three o'clock in the afternoon, at the earliest. He was fairly startled out of his good manners, and exclaimed, half involuntarily, 'You were at El Biar this morning, monsieur?'

Barrington saw his dismay, and rather enjoyed it. 'I rode up after breakfast,' he answered; 'I wanted to try the horse you sold me.'

'And I hope you found him satisfactory,' said Saint-Luc, recovering himself.

Barrington would have liked to say that the horse was a little touched in the wind; but, not being quite sure of his French, had to smile and reply, 'Perfectly.'

'I am charmed to hear it. For the rest, I was sure you would be contented with him.—What is it, Léon? Ah, *mauvais sujet*! you are longing for the green cloth. As you will, then! Come, let us go and earn a headache for to-morrow morning. Monsieur will not be of the party? *Au revoir*, then.'

And so the two gamesters strolled away.

'Do you know,' said Léon, confidentially, as soon as they were out of earshot, 'I am not sure that I like Mr. Barrington so well as I did at first. Sometimes I think he is a little too conceited and dictatorial.'

'You say that because he gave you good advice,' laughed the other good-humouredly. 'Bah! he was right, *mon garçon*;

high play leads to no good ; and if my past gave me the right to offer advice to anyone, I should back him up. Unhappily for you, you made the acquaintance of a worthless fellow when you met me. What would you have ? It is too late to mend now. *Video meliora proboque ; deteriora sequor.*'

And, having made this classic confession with a fine sonorous ring, the Vicomte linked his arm in that of his young friend, and led him through the open doors of the *Cercle*.

As for Barrington, he made his way back to the Hôtel d'Orient, and, happening to meet an acquaintance in the hall, took occasion to express his opinion of M. de Saint-Luc with perfect candour.

'A man who can find nothing better to do than to lead boys into mischief ought to be kicked,' said he. 'I don't know what name you have for that sort of fellow in French : in England we should call him a "leg."'

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME DE TRÉMONVILLE'S DANCE.

It was admitted on all hands that Madame de Trémonville's entertainments were invariably brilliant and successful. Her abode was one of the most spacious of the many charming villas which cover the hillside of Mustapha ; she never overcrowded her rooms, she paid special attention to the excellence of the refreshments provided ; and she even affected a certain exclusiveness, declining to know people who had not something—whether beauty, rank, wealth, or talent—to recommend them. Without much difficulty she succeeded in becoming a leader of Algerian society, and those whom she invited to her soirées seldom sent her a refusal. The Duchesse de Breuil and a few other Legitimist ladies looked down upon her, it is true ; but that was a matter of course. They would have looked down upon anybody whose husband held office under the then existing Government, and this disdain gave Madame de Trémonville very little concern. She rather enjoyed an occasional passage-of-arms with Madame de Vaublanc ; and for the rest she took good care that these ladies should recognise her when they met in any public place, and insisted upon visiting

them, whether they liked it or not. 'It is *chic* to be upon good terms with the old noblesse,' she would sometimes say.

Her reputation was not wholly free from reproach; nor was she well spoken of by the ladies of her acquaintance. As, however, nothing had as yet been proved against her, as she was very hospitable, and, as she had a retentive memory and a sharp tongue, she was always able to fill her ball-room with members of the best society Algiers could produce.

Barrington, whom Léon in fulfilment of his promise duly escorted to Madame de Trémonville's next dance, was enchanted with the scene that met his eye as he passed through the doorway, where the mistress of the house stood smiling impartially upon each fresh arrival. The large square room into which he looked, with its white walls, its polished *parquet* and its multitude of lights, was all ablaze with showy uniforms and jewels. As far as appearance went, Madame de Trémonville's modest *salon* might have been the reception-room of an ambassadress—so closely do ordinary mortals resemble their more exalted brethren if decked out in sufficiently fine clothes. The ladies were all well dressed—as indeed any community of French women would be sure to be, however remote their habitation—and if the Orders which adorned the coats of the gentlemen were not invariably of the first or second class, they did not on that account make a less brave show. To the uninitiated eye one ribbon or star is very much like another.

Barrington, while scrutinising with pleased surprise so refined and civilised a gathering, was a little disappointed at failing to discover Mademoiselle de Mersac among the guests. He watched the dancers from the beginning to the end of a waltz; he sauntered through the ball-room, the card-room beyond it, and out on to the verandah, lit by hanging Moorish lamps of coloured glass; but nowhere could he discover the graceful, majestic figure of which he was in search. Léon offered to introduce him to a partner, and in common courtesy he could not decline; but as soon as he had walked through a set of Lancers he returned to the doorway, and resumed his patient watch. The only entry he witnessed for his pains was that of M. de Saint-Luc, who lounged in very late, and surveyed the assemblage with a look of anxiety gradually deepening into intense annoyance and disgust, which caused the other disappointed watcher to chuckle in his corner.

Madame de Trémonville advanced to meet her guest with marked cordiality. In him she recognised one of the most pro-

ninent men of the epoch. Algiers generally knew little of M. de Saint-Luc, except that he had dissipated a large fortune by riotous living; but Madame de Trémonville was not as those barbarians. She knew her Paris; and was proud to welcome the man whom Imperialism had delighted to honour. Thanks to her sedulous study of certain Parisian journals, as well as to sundry private sources of information, she could have given him a tolerably accurate account of all his escapades in chronological order. Some years back, being at Longchamps, she had seen him leaning on the carriage-door of one of the famous ladies who frequented the Emperor's Court. The great race of the day had just been lost and won, and the crowd was beginning to disperse. A bystander, nudging his companion, had said, 'Do you see that man? That is the Vicomte de Saint-Luc, who has just lost a hundred thousand francs—there is one who ruins himself gaily'—and Madame de Trémonville, overhearing the remark, had watched the imperturbable loser with increased interest, had seen him slowly make his way through the lines of carriages, bowing to one lady, shaking hands with another, and exchanging a few words with a third, till he reached the equipage of a notorious leader of the *demi-monde*, into which he had stepped and had been driven away with the eyes of all Paris upon him. Madame de Trémonville, witnessing this little scene, had felt a momentary thrill of noble enthusiasm. 'That is my ideal of a man!' she had exclaimed. So strange are the masculine ideals which some ladies have come to set up for themselves in the days in which we live. She donned her most winning smile, therefore, as she held out a tiny white-gloved hand to this hero, and thanked him for honouring her poor soirée with his presence.

'You will not find our little society amusing, monsieur,' she said, deprecatingly; 'but what can you expect? With the best will in the world, it is impossible to transplant the Tuileries to Africa!'

Saint-Luc expressed contented acquiescence in this indisputable geographical fact, and took an early opportunity of escaping from his amiable hostess. He leant against the wall and contemplated the company with a gloomy disapproval for which their provincialism was in no way responsible. There was M. de Trémonville, elderly, smooth-shaven, and dapper, rubbing his hands and beaming through his spectacles—the incarnation of a bureaucrat. (His real name was Bonjean; but, following the example of many others of the Emperor's servants,

he had tacked the name of his native place on to his own plebeian patronymic, and now signed himself Bonjean de Trémonville, when he did not forget the Bonjean altogether. 'After all,' as Madame de Vaublanc was wont to say, in her good-natured way, 'the man must have been born somewhere, and why not at Trémonville—if there be such a place? Let us at least be thankful that he did not first see the light at Condé or Montmorency.') Then there was Madame Waranieff, a fat Russian lady, who was at Algiers for her health, with her two fuzzy-haired marriageable daughters on either side of her; there was little M. de Fontvieille, with his nose in the air, conversing with Monseigneur the Archbishop, who had condescended to show himself for a few minutes at the house of so devout a member of his flock as Madame de Trémonville; there were the Sous-Gouverneur, the Préfet, the Sous-Préfet, the Mayor, half-a-dozen generals, and their wives, their daughters, their aides-de-camp, and their secretaries.

'*Parbleu!* they are *all* here,' growled Saint-Luc under his breath—'all except the one person whom I came to meet.'

But before the words had well escaped his lips he heard the voice of his hostess behind him welcoming some new-comer in her most honeyed accents. 'Ah, dear madame, is it possible that my poor little dance can have induced you to break through your rule of going to bed at half-past nine? It is too great an honour that you do me—really too great an honour!' And turning round to see who this distinguished guest might be, he became aware of Madame de Vaublanc's sour visage, above which, serene and beautiful, towered the head and shoulders of Mademoiselle de Mersac. At this sight M. de Saint-Luc's features, which had hitherto worn an expression of the deepest dejection, became suddenly cheerful and animated. He made a hurried move in the direction of the doorway; but here his progress was interrupted by Madame de Vaublanc, who was eagerly explaining to her hostess that she was not there for her own pleasure.

'I never go to balls, not even to those given by my most intimate friends, much less—that is, I really never enter a ball-room. It was Mademoiselle de Mersac who persuaded me—she had no chaperon, and I did not wish her to be deprived of a little amusement—she does not have too much, poor child!—otherwise——'

'Then we are doubly indebted to mademoiselle,' returned Madame de Trémonville, sweetly. 'It was already very amiable

of her to join a party of which she will be the chief ornament; but since she has brought you too with her, madame, I have no more fear as to the success of my evening.'

'Oh, madame, your compliment is intended to be ironical, no doubt; ugly old women are no attraction in any *salon*.'

'Kindness and courtesy, madame, are attractive in persons of all ages.'

Saint-Luc waited patiently till these amenities should be exhausted, and Madame de Vaublanc should see fit to leave the gangway free. Meanwhile Mr. Barrington, being less scrupulous, had pushed his way past the old lady, with a brief 'Pardon, madame;' and having shaken hands with Jeanne, who received him cordially, was writing his name upon her card. He wrote it more than once, as Saint-Luc observed with jealous surprise. What could there be in this self-satisfied Englishman to make Jeanne, who treated all men alike with the same *hauteur*, unbend towards him as towards an old friend? Was it because he was a Protestant, a foreigner, a man whom she could never be asked to marry, that she allowed him to take her ball-card from her hand, and only laughed when he held out her fan at arm's length and pretended to criticise the painting upon it with an artist's eye? Saint-Luc would fain have believed so; but there was a look of frank admiration in Mr. Barrington's blue eyes which he could not but perceive, and which caused him a good deal of uneasiness. At length Madame de Vaublanc moved on into the room, and then his opportunity came. He had already bowed to Jeanne from afar, and had received a cold acknowledgment of his salute. He now stepped to her side as she swept past him. 'Mademoiselle will accord me a dance, I hope?' he said, humbly.

She stopped at once, and drawing out her card, answered with that chilly politeness which always froze poor Saint-Luc's pretty speeches before they were uttered, 'With pleasure, monsieur; which dance shall it be?'

He named a waltz half-way down the programme, and, with a slight bend of her head, she had left him before he had found courage enough to ask for a second one. He fell back, almost inclined to laugh at his own timidity. The truth is that the Vicomte de Saint-Luc, who had led cotillions in the presence of royalty, who had danced with princesses, and whose audacity in pushing his advances towards any lady whom he might chance to honour with his preference was a matter of notoriety,

was as diffident as any schoolboy in the presence of the girl whom he loved.

‘I am an imbecile—a veritable imbecile,’ he murmured impatiently, as he lounged up to do his duty to the lady of the house.

With her, at all events, he was quite at ease. She belonged to a species with whose habits and tastes he was thoroughly conversant; and he managed, without any effort, to dance with her and take his fair share of the conversation, while, at the same time, his whole attention was fixed upon Jeanne, not one of whose movements escaped him. Many other eyes besides his were turned in the same direction. Mademoiselle de Mersac did not often appear in Algerian ball-rooms; but when she did honour them by her presence she never failed to excite more admiration than anyone else in the room. Her beauty was of that superb kind which refuses to be ignored; it eclipsed the mere prettiness of other women as the moon outshines the stars, and extorted an unwilling tribute even from those who would gladly have depreciated it—for unfortunately the people who had been, or imagined themselves to have been, slighted by the imperious Jeanne formed no inconsiderable portion of any society in which she was likely to show herself. This evening her praises were sung with more cordiality than usual, for she was in an exceptionally gracious mood, and, contrary to her custom, had engaged herself for every dance. She refused no partner till her card was full; she waltzed impartially with Mr. Barrington, with M. de Choisy, the Governor-General’s aide-de-camp, with little Martin, a sub-lieutenant in a line regiment, who was only admitted into society because his uncle was a bishop—and with a dozen others. She wore a dress of pale primrose silk (it was her habit to affect costumes somewhat richer than those generally adopted by unmarried ladies), and had steel ornaments on her neck, ears, and hair, which flashed with every turn of her graceful head. She was incontestably the most striking figure in the room.

This did not please Madame de Trémonville, who had no liking for the part of second fiddle, and who, previous to the arrival of this magnificent rival, had flattered herself that she had nothing to fear from comparison with any of her guests. ‘Do you admire gigantic women?’ she whispered to Saint-Luc. ‘For my part, I think excessive size is as much a defect in us as it is a beauty in you.’

Saint-Luc, who stood six feet two in his socks, answered

mechanically that he had no eye for proportions, but that those of madame were, without doubt, the standard by which the whole sex should be judged ; and received a playful tap on the shoulder from his partner's fan, in acknowledgment of this novel and delicate compliment. Madame de Trémonville's green velvet and Brussels lace, her exquisite complexion, and her wondrous coiffure were altogether thrown away upon him. He had not even noticed the diamonds which encircled her throat and sparkled amid her golden locks.

'All paste,' sneered Madame de Vaublanc, scrutinising these jewels from the corner where she had ensconced herself beside a congenial friend—'bought in the Palais Royal for a few hundred francs, you may be sure. Is it likely that that poor man would accept a small employment in Algeria if he could afford to give his wife such diamonds as those? Absurd!'

'Perhaps he did not buy them,' suggested the other amiable matron ; 'perhaps they were a *present*. It is said that M. de Trémonville does not object to his wife's receiving occasional marks of esteem from her friends. They were talking of her the other night at the Palace—and between ourselves——' Here the good lady's voice is lowered to so confidential a pitch that we can't quite catch what she says. Very likely we don't lose much. Communications of a somewhat similar nature are to be heard every night in all countries and in all classes of society. What is an old woman without daughters to do at a ball, except to take away the character of the young ones? Madame de Trémonville, whose conduct, it must be allowed, had more than once exhibited a target for the arrows of scandal to be aimed at, knew very well that ladies of Madame de Vaublanc's calibre could do her very little real injury ; it amused her to know that they were on her track, and she liked to lead them on, and double, and baffle them when she was in the humour. Partly with this laudable object in view, and partly for her own gratification, she made a dead set at Saint-Luc during the early part of the evening, dismissing her other partners to dance with him again and again, till, seeing a large figure 9 hung out in front of the orchestra, he quitted her side rather abruptly.

'At last!' he muttered, as he made his way through the crowd to a small boudoir which he had seen Jeanne enter with Barrington at the end of the last dance. He found her seated on a low divan, the Englishman sprawling at her side, and presented himself with a bow. She glanced up at him inquir-

ingly, then down at her card, and rising immediately placed her hand within the arm which he offered her; and so they re-entered the ball-room.

'You have danced a great deal this evening, mademoiselle,' said Saint-Luc, with that strange difficulty in opening the conversation which he had never experienced in his intercourse with any woman except Jeanne.

'Yes; a good deal.'

'More than usual, I think.'

'Yes, rather more than usual.'

'I fancied you did not care much for balls.'

'*C'est selon.*'

'I suppose you mean that it depends upon your partners,' said Saint-Luc, with a tinge of annoyance in his voice. Her manner was disagreeable enough to justify some resentment; but it was more with himself than with her that he was vexed; for he felt that, somehow or other, he was not showing to advantage.

'Naturally,' she answered.

'Is that Mr. Barrington a good dancer?'

'Mr. Barrington? Yes, he dances well.'

'He must differ then from the rest of his nation. Without vanity, I will venture to assert that you will find ten good dancers in France for one in England.'

'Really?'

'Yes. There are exceptions, of course; but, as a rule, Englishmen are not made for society. They always seem to me to require the open air. Out of doors they have a certain rough good humour, which excuses a good deal of *gaucherie*; but put them in a *salon*, and they become insupportable.'

'You have been in England, monsieur?'

'No; but I have met a great many Englishmen. Perhaps I am prejudiced, but frankly I do not like them. After all, the French and English are hereditary enemies.'

'My mother was an Englishwoman; and, for my own part, I have always been proud of being half English,' said Jeanne.

After that Saint-Luc thought he would change the subject.

'Is it an impertinence, mademoiselle,' he said, 'to congratulate you upon your charming toilette? I have seen nothing like it since I left Paris.'

A very slight bend of the head, combined with a supercilious droop of the eyelids and an upward curve of the lips, seemed to imply, as plainly as politeness would permit, that

Mademoiselle de Mersac *did* consider the remark an impertinence.

Saint-Luc felt this to be rather hard; it was so utterly at variance with all his experience that any lady should object to hear her dress praised. He was completely silenced, and bit his moustache moodily. It was Jeanne who spoke next.

‘Shall we not dance?’ she said; ‘the waltz is half over.’

It really seemed the only thing to be done. In this particular, at all events, Saint-Luc felt that he could hardly give offence. His Parisian apprenticeship had lasted so long that he knew himself to be a complete master of the art of waltzing; and as he piloted his partner smoothly and swiftly through the throng, never losing time, and never so much as brushing against another couple, he took some comfort from the thought that though it appeared impossible for him to open his mouth in Jeanne’s presence without angering her, she could not at least complain of him as a partner.

When the dance was at an end he got a little disdainful compliment for his pains.

‘You have a right to criticise the dancing of others, Monsieur de Saint-Luc,’ said Jeanne; ‘your own is perfect.’ If she had added, ‘You are fit for nothing better than dancing,’ she could not have conveyed her meaning more clearly to the mind of her hearer.

The poor Vicomte was as much puzzled as he was hurt. He could not in the least understand the girl, nor what she was driving at. He would have liked to ask her point-blank what he had done to be so cruelly snubbed, and why she should regard a man who had never willingly offended her with such determined aversion. Had he done so, he would have risen several degrees in her estimation, and would probably have got an honest answer into the bargain; but he thought that conventionality debarred him from so straightforward a course—and, after a minute’s consideration, he could find no better rejoinder than a rather aggrieved one to the effect that he did not care about dancing, and would not have been where he was that night, had he not been told that he would be rewarded by meeting Mademoiselle de Mersac.

‘You do not like dancing?’ said Jeanne incredulously, passing by his reference to herself. ‘I thought you were such a famous leader of cotillons. *À propos*, who leads the cotillon this evening?’

‘I suppose you know that I am to do it,’ answered Saint-

Luc, with a little vexed laugh. 'I should have preferred to refuse; but what could I do when that woman insisted? She is one of those people who are no more disturbed by a refusal than a rhinoceros by a discharge of small shot.'

'If you do not like her, why do you dance so much with her?' asked Jeanne gravely. 'You have scarcely left her side the whole evening, and now you compare her to a rhinoceros. I wonder what flattering likeness you will discover for me when my back is turned.'

Saint-Luc was very patient, and very much in love; but this unremitting hostility was becoming too much even for him.

'When you know me better, mademoiselle,' he said coldly, 'you will find that I do not speak ill of my friends. As for Madame de Trémonville, she is no friend of mine. Here comes your partner for the next dance. I suppose I must not hope to be honoured by another.'

Mademoiselle de Mersac regretted that she was engaged for the remainder of the evening; and so, with a slight inclination of her head, passed back into the ball-room on the arm of the happy M. Martin, leaving Saint-Luc to meditate over the progress of his suit. He shrugged his shoulders in contemptuous wonder at his own infatuation as he made his way into the card-room, where three old gentlemen were playing whist with dummy; and there he remained, not caring to dance again, till the time came for him to fulfil his cotillon duties.

The cotillon, without which no French ball is complete, has failed to take root as an institution in England, probably because it has never been rightly understood in this country, where, indeed, it is usually considered to be a sort of organised romp, of which the principal features are the stationing of a lady in the middle of the floor with a looking-glass in her hand, the throwing of a ball to be scrambled for by a line of male competitors, and the affixing of a set of harness, adorned with jingling-bells, to the shoulders of four unhappy and self-conscious men, who are then driven round the room, feebly endeavouring to mitigate the absurdity of their position by an agonised imitation of the pawing and prancing of a spirited team. What Madame de Trémonville understood by a cotillon was something infinitely more intricate, more artistic, and more decorous than this. With its complicated figures, its crossings of hands, its frequent changes of partners, its involutions and evolutions, and its stately rhythmic measures which melted into waltzes, it was a performance which required some study and management,

and no one was expected to take part in it who was not familiar with its more ordinary figures, and who was not quick at catching up the new ones which were constantly being introduced into it. The inevitable looking-glass, the bouquets, and the badges were not omitted from the programme; but they were by no means its chief feature, nor did they lead to anything in the semblance of a romp. Not that Madame de Trémonville had any objection to the latter method of passing the time when her more intimate friends were gathered about her—on the contrary, she had a strong predilection for it, derived, like her Ultramontanism, her penchant for *bric-à-brac*, and many other incongruous tastes, from quarters whence she obtained her notion of the prevailing fashion—but in mixed society, she judged it best to earn a character for elegance rather than eccentricity.

‘Are you not ashamed of yourself?’ she cried, seeking out Saint-Luc in the card-room, towards two o’clock in the morning, and rousing him by her thin falsetto voice from the reverie in which he had been plunged. ‘Does one go to balls to look on at a game of whist?’

‘What pleasure could it have given me to remain in the ball-room and see you dancing with others?’ returned Saint-Luc, in his politely perfunctory manner.

‘Ah, bah! you were lazy. I would have danced with you if you had taken the trouble to ask me. In your absence, I have been amusing myself with your friend the little marquis, whom I found much improved by his travels. He will develop himself. I have great hopes of him. But now I am going to make you work, whether you will or no. Here is the list of our figures for the cotillon. With which would you advise me to begin?’

Saint-Luc took the strip of paper which she handed to him, and having perused it, briefly delivered his opinion as to one or two points in the programme; Madame de Trémonville listening to him with as much reverence as a newly-joined subaltern displays in listening to his colonel. In truth, Saint-Luc had long ago reached the highest grades in that service of fashionable society of which the lady was but a hanger-on and exiled admirer.

Entering the ball-room presently, laden with the paraphernalia of flowers, ribbons, hoops, and so forth, necessary for the task set before him, he was surprised to see Jeanne seated upon one of the chairs which had been ranged round the room for the convenience of the dancers. Knowing how seldom she

lingered at any entertainment after midnight, he had not counted upon seeing her again that evening, and perhaps the sight of her might have pleased as well as surprised him if the tenant of the chair next to hers had not been Mr. Barrington. As it was, he frowned uneasily. Of Barrington in the character of a possible husband for Jeanne he had no fear; difference of nation, religion, and language were sufficient guarantees against the chance of such a match being proposed; but he was jealous, furiously jealous, of the man who, without any apparent effort, had managed to make himself acceptable to Mademoiselle de Mersac during an entire evening, and who was even now bending over her with a familiarity which he—Saint-Luc—would never have dared to assume. Had he been a vain man he would have been mortified at the ease with which another had succeeded where he had so lamentably failed; but vain he was not—only envious and jealous, as was but natural under the circumstances.

Saint-Luc had reduced the leading of a cotillon to a science. He could direct its most intricate movements, and at the same time reserve a large portion of his attention for some other subject. He was able, therefore, to acquit himself to the entire satisfaction of his hostess, while watching with increasing pain and wonder the progress of the sudden intimacy which had sprung up between Jeanne and the Englishman. Observing the unconscious couple thus closely, he soon became aware of a phenomenon for which he was at first at a loss to account; namely, that, whereas Barrington was evidently in the best of spirits, and grew more talkative and merry with each successive figure, Jeanne, on the contrary, was as evidently dissatisfied, and became gradually graver and more pre-occupied, till at last she ceased to speak to or notice her partner at all. It was not till the cotillon was three parts over that Saint-Luc discovered the clue to this change of mood. A most decided frown upon Jeanne's straight brows and an impatient tap of her foot enlightened him. He followed the direction of her glance, and was just in time to catch the conclusion of a little scene which the rest of the company had been watching with more or less of satirical interest. Exactly in the centre of the room, before the eyes of all Algiers, Madame de Trémonville, having selected a flower from a bouquet which she held in her hand, was presenting it to Léon, who, with the sublime fatuity of which only a very young Frenchman can be capable, raised it to his lips before fixing it into his button-hole. The figure which had just

come to an end was that in which gentlemen are permitted to select their partners by the presentation of a bouquet, and it was in the above-mentioned way that the mistress of the house chose to manifest her recognition of the compliment paid her by the young marquis. Saint-Luc recollected immediately that Madame de Trémonville had invariably singled out Léon when she had been called upon to choose a partner, and the reason of Jeanne's displeasure became obvious to him. In her place he would have been disposed rather to laugh than to be angry; but, regarding Jeanne as he did with a reverential awe, as a being of infinitely greater purity and nobility than himself, he understood that, in her eyes, any semblance of flirtation with a married woman must be a heinous crime, and more with a view to saving her annoyance than to rescuing his young friend from any possible peril, he resolved to take an early opportunity of speaking a few words of friendly caution to Léon. His own bouquet, which he ought by rights to have presented to some lady, lay unheeded on the floor at his side. He had not taken the trouble to offer it to anyone, seeing that the only person in the room whose good-will he valued in the least had shown him in the most unmistakable manner that his attentions were unwelcome.

But now humility was unexpectedly rewarded. For, the order of the dance being changed, and it being the turn of the ladies to choose the partners most agreeable to them, who should come gravely up to the diffident Vicomte, with a little badge of red ribbon outheld between her finger and thumb, but Mademoiselle de Mersac?

Saint-Luc started, half-delighted, half-doubtful. For a second he thought the stately young lady who stood before him must have made some mistake; but no—there was the knot of red ribbon within an inch of his nose, proffered a trifle disdainfully, it is true, yet distinctly intended for him. He pinned it on his coat, too much bewildered to find any words, and mechanically placed his arm round Jeanne's slender waist. But before he had taken half a turn round the room, his partner let him know that she wished to stop. They were then exactly opposite the door.

'I am going away,' she said in that quiet, commanding tone, as of a superior to an inferior, which she always used in addressing Saint-Luc. 'If they can spare you for a few minutes, I should be much obliged if you would take me out to get my wraps.'

'They *must* spare me,' he answered joyfully, leading her out

into the dim hall, where Madame de Vaublanc, with a wonderful peaked hood on her head and a multiplicity of cloaks and mufflers about her small person, was awaiting her charge. 'If they want me, they must do without me. I should be perfectly willing to send them all to purgatory for the chance of doing you the smallest service.'

'That will not be necessary,' answered Jeanne, with a slight smile; 'but it happens that I have to ask you to do me a small service—in fact, I brought you out here for that purpose.'

'If it be in my power to do what you wish, mademoiselle, you may consider it an accomplished fact.'

'It is certainly in your power,' she said, and paused for a moment. Then she resumed, rather hurriedly—'You have great influence over my brother—more, I think, than I have, in some things. I want you to use it to keep him away from Madame de Trémonville. You will understand what I mean. You saw what took place to-night; and Léon is a young man; and—and I suppose all young men are the same. And he will listen to you, though I doubt whether he would listen to me. I would not ask you to do me this favour,' she concluded, 'if it were likely to give you any trouble or inconvenience; but, so far as I can see, it will do neither. After all, you can scarcely have any *interest* in bringing my brother and Madame de Trémonville together.'

For an instant the colour rose to Saint-Luc's pale cheeks, and his eyes flashed; but he had perfect self-control, and it was without any show of anger, though more coldly than usual, that he answered, 'I do not know from whence you have derived your opinion of me, mademoiselle; but it does not appear to be a high one. For the rest, you are quite right—I am not worth much; yet I am capable occasionally of acting from other motives than those of self-interest; and as to the subject of which you speak, I had already intended to take the liberty of saying a few words to your brother about it—so that you need not feel annoyed by the thought that you are under any obligation to me—however small—in the matter.'

And as Jeanne looked at him a little doubtfully, he added, 'Some day, mademoiselle, you will perhaps acknowledge that, whatever my faults may be, I am, at least, not untrue to my friends.'

Jeanne, not being as yet convinced of the truth of this statement, and finding nothing to say in answer to it, merely bowed, and turned to follow Madame de Vaublanc, whom M. de

Trémouville was now helping into her carriage. But when she had taken a few steps, she wheeled round, and marching back to Saint-Luc, said abruptly—

‘It is possible that I have been unjust to you, monsieur ; if so, I am sorry for it. And I think I treated you rather rudely earlier in the evening ; I am very sorry for that also, and I beg your pardon. Now you had better return to the ball-room, or they will wonder what has become of you. Good-night.’

The apology was not a very graceful one, nor was it delivered by any means in a contrite tone ; but, such as it was, Saint-Luc gladly accepted it, and went back to conclude his duties with a somewhat lighter heart. As for Jeanne, she left the house telling herself that she neither liked the man nor trusted him, but that, upon the whole, she had perhaps been wrong in letting him see so plainly what her feelings with regard to him were. She had, therefore, offered him her excuses—and what more could be expected of her ?

At the door she met Barrington, who came up, hat in hand, and said eagerly, ‘You won’t forget your promise, will you ?’

‘My promise ?’ she returned interrogatively, ‘Oh, you mean about the picture. No, I will not forget, and if the Duchess has no objection, I shall be happy to appear in it. When will you come and make your arrangements ? To-morrow ! Very well ; then we will expect you at breakfast-time—twelve o’clock. Good-night.’

She spoke indifferently enough, being at the moment occupied with reflections in which the Englishman and his artistic tastes had no share, but her voice had a perceptibly more friendly ring than that in which she had addressed Saint-Luc ; and Barrington, as he lit his cigar, and strolled down towards the town, through scented orange-groves, and under the shade of olives and carob-trees, grey and ghostly in the starlight, laughed triumphantly to himself. ‘I was sure I should get her to sit to me,’ he thought. ‘Really, if people only knew it, the best way to gain anything is to ask for it. Most men don’t understand that, and lose what they want because they wait for it to be offered to them. Heavens ! what a splendid creature she is, and how mad that poor devil of a Frenchman is about her. I doubt whether *his* asking for what he wants would be of much use ; yet he would have a better chance if he came straight to the point with her, instead of throwing himself down at her feet to be trampled upon. I could give him a hint or two, if I wanted him to succeed--only I don’t.’

CHAPTER VII.

BARRINGTON STUDIES THE PICTURESQUE.

'COLOUR,' said Barrington sententiously, leaning back in his rocking-chair and pointing with the end of his cigarette to the liquid blue sky above him with lazy approbation—'colour is one of the chief delights of existence. It is wonderful how few people realise that truth. And yet all human beings are more or less under the influence of colour, and are made happy by the sight of it, or dispirited by its absence, as they would know if they took the pains to analyse their sensations. The man who has the room next to mine at the Hôtel d'Orient is dying of consumption; his doctor has sent him here, without a single relation or friend, to get well—which he has about as much chance of doing as I have of becoming Pope; and he doesn't speak more than a few words of French, and he doesn't like foreign cooking, and he says the fleas bite him, and he wishes to goodness he was back in England. One can't help taking an interest in one's next door neighbour—though I must say I wish he didn't cough so much at nights; but that is not his fault, poor beggar!—so I generally look in after breakfast and try to cheer him up a little. Well, this morning when I went to see him as usual, I found him sitting at the open window, twirling a bunch of violets between his finger and thumb, and whistling as merrily as a cricket. I asked him what made him so cheerful, and he said he really didn't know, unless it was that there was a fine warm sun to-day. Stuff! Take the man's violets away from him, and plant him in his armchair in the middle of the Sahara, and do you suppose he would whistle? Not he! I knew, though he didn't, that it was the sight of the cobalt sea and the far away purple hills, and the Moors in the street below, and the children selling flowers, and of a hundred subtle effects produced by refraction, that was making him happy; and I declare, when I looked at him, I wished with all my heart that his relations would come out here to him, and that he would not live to return to England. One feels nearer heaven in such a climate as this; and, for my part, I never can understand how it is that there is as much crime in the South of Europe as in the North. Hang it all! you have no *right* to be wicked in a country where Nature is so kind to

you. Thanks ; I will take just one drop of that green Chartreuse, and then, if you will allow me, I will go and find your sister, and set to work.'

Mr. Barrington was sitting in the verandah at the Campagne de Mersac. Through the open windows of the dining-room at his back might have been seen a deserted breakfast-table, whose snowy damask, heaped-up fruit, half-empty decanters, and profusion of flowers formed a combination of colour which he had already duly appreciated while rendering justice to the merits of his friend's cook. At his side was a small table, on which stood a silver Moorish coffee-pot, two cups, and a liqueur-decanter, and beyond it, Léon, clad in a complete suit of white duck, reclined in an easy-chair, puffing at his cigarette with a somewhat bewildered expression of countenance, having had some difficulty in following the foreign idiom in which the above harangue had been couched.

'One has no right to be wicked anywhere,' he observed with undeniable justice, in reply to the speaker's last words.

'Of course not ; but don't you see what a difference surroundings ought to make ? A man who at the end of his day's work finds himself in a dismal, filthy street, with the rain chilling him to the bones, and no object that his eyes can rest upon but what is hideous and melancholy, naturally betakes himself to the first place where he can get liquor enough to make him forget his misery—after which he goes home, and, by way of protest against the hopelessness of his existence, knocks his wife down and kicks her about the head.'

'I do not think we do that in Algeria,' said Léon ; 'but there are often cases of stabbing, especially among the Spaniards, whose knives are always ready. And as to the climate, you cannot judge of its effects till you have spent a summer here, and have felt the influence of a three days' sirocco upon your nerves. I can assure you that after twenty-four hours of it, you would be capable of taking your own mother by the hair if she irritated you ; and, as a fact, there is far more violence at such times than ordinarily.'

'Indeed ? So it all works round to much the same thing in the end ; and there is compensation in everyone's lot—or at least, a grievance, which is still pleasanter. All the same, I don't think I should mind living in Algeria ; in fact, I think I should very much like it, and I am not sure that I wouldn't do it if I were a free man, and hadn't my own poor acres to look after in England. I wonder now whether one could make a

small farm here pay its way ; it would be an excuse for running over for a few months every year.'

Léon shook his head. 'You would be robbed,' he said. 'Even if you lived upon your farm, it is not likely that you would make money by it, and if you were absent it is certain that you would lose a great deal. Besides, the life would not suit you, even for a few months. For me it is different. I have been accustomed to it from a child, and I have no dislike either to the heat or the loneliness of the summer. Some day I will take you out to the little farm where I breed my horses, beyond Koléah, and we will get up a boar-hunt to amuse you. You will be pleased with it at this season of the year, for it stands high, overlooking the Metidja plain and facing the Atlas mountains, and the air is strong and fresh, and though there is no cultivation just in the neighbourhood, you can see the corn-fields and orange-groves beneath you, and the white houses of Blidah far away under the opposite hills ; but in summer it is melancholy enough. Then the whole country is parched and burnt brown ; there is generally a mist over the mountains, and most people find the silence oppressive. Nevertheless old Pierre Cauvin and I generally spend three weeks or so there in August, and sometimes Jeanne comes with us, and then we are as happy as children. Early every morning, and again at sunset, we gallop over the country for miles, and the young horses follow us in a troop, squealing and kicking up their heels, and we feel as if the whole world belonged to us. Ah, that is the life ! I like the world and society and amusement, but I don't think I ever enjoy myself so well as when I am quite free, and away from civilisation. I suppose living so much among the Arabs has made me a little of a savage at heart. Jeanne, Mr. Barrington says he would like to buy a farm in Algeria, and I tell him he would lose his money if he did, and would hate the country and the climate into the bargain. It is not everyone who can transform himself into a Bedouin like you and me, *ma sœur*.'

Léon had spoken in his own language, but Jeanne, who now showed herself at the window, with Turco at her side, turned to Barrington with a bright smile and addressed him in English, which she spoke quite correctly, but with just enough of foreign accent to lend it a charm not its own.

'You really think of buying land here ?' she said. 'How delightful that would be !'

Barrington was so much pleased and flattered, that if Léon

had offered to sell him a few hundred acres off-hand, he would very likely have consented to the bargain then and there; but before he had time to reply, Jeanne broke into a laugh at the absurdity of her own notion. 'Of course you were not speaking seriously,' she said. 'Algiers is pleasant enough in the winter time, and when you have a comfortable hotel to lodge in; but to live in one of our rough farmhouses—that is another thing! I think you would not remain with us long. Now, when will you begin your picture?'

'Whenever you are ready,' answered Barrington. 'I thought, if you did not mind taking up your position in that chair at the end of the verandah, I might station myself in the garden below, so as to get in the marabout, which is really the most characteristic part of the house.'

It was the house that this artful schemer had requested permission to delineate. He represented himself as an enthusiastic admirer of Moorish architecture, and only suggested as an innocent afterthought that a portrait of Mademoiselle de Mersac, seated on the balcony, would add life to his picture. He went off in search of his materials, and, on his return, found that he was likely to have a *tête-à-tête* interview with his fair model, Léon having slipped away to look after his farm duties.

'So much the better; two is company, three is none,' he thought, as he set up his easel within a few feet of the carved balustrade beside which Jeanne was sitting in a low chair, Turco resting his great head on her knee, and blinking lazily from his shady position at the painter out in the sunshine.

'Surely you are placing yourself too close,' Jeanne said, turning to look down upon him; 'you will only be able to take a very small corner of the house from where you are sitting.'

'It is only a very small corner that I want,' replied Barrington, without hesitation. 'As far as general effect goes, these Moorish buildings are not striking; their beauty lies in their carved woodwork and arabesques and marble pillars, and, and, and—in detail, in short. If I were a dozen yards away, I couldn't possibly do justice to the detail—don't you see?'

'Could you not? I am very glad, at all events, that you are obliged to approach so near, for now we can talk,' said Jeanne, unsuspectingly. 'I am anxious to hear what you think of our little colonial society. Did you enjoy your elf last night?'

'Immensely,' answered Barrington with a strong emphasis

on the word. 'I don't know when I have enjoyed a ball so much. Would you mind turning round a little, so that I may get your face quite in profile? I shall have to take one or two sketches before I begin the picture itself. Thank you very much. How could I do otherwise than enjoy myself when—when everybody was so kind and hospitable? And you—were you tolerably well amused?'

'Oh, yes,' answered Jeanne, a slight cloud coming over her face, 'it was very pleasant—at least for part of the evening. I got a little tired of it towards the end; but I am not very fond of balls.'

'I am afraid you must have repented of your kindness in giving me the cotillon,' said Barrington, executing a few rapid strokes, and surveying the result with his head thrown back. 'I am not a first-rate waltzer, I know.'

'First-rate, no!' answered Jeanne, candidly; 'but you dance very well—remarkably well, indeed, for an Englishman. Besides, I am not exacting.'

'I suppose we English *are* a clumsy people,' remarked Barrington, with just a tinge of disappointment in his tone—for indeed he was considered an excellent dancer both in his own county and in London—'our education does not include a great many useful little accomplishments. As for me, I have perhaps had rather more advantages than other fellows—not that I am conceited about it, or anything of that kind, you know—still I did learn to dance at Vienna.'

'Did you?' said Jeanne, stroking Turco's head and gazing absently out to sea. 'The Austrians are the best waltzers in the world, are they not?'

She was evidently so little interested in the subject that Barrington did not think it worth while to reply to her last question, and returned to his sketch with an uncomfortable impression of having vaunted himself without effect.

There was a silence of nearly five minutes, which Jeanne broke at last by taking up the conversation exactly where she had left it.

'You do not care to be thought a good dancer, do you?' she asked.

'I? Oh, I don't know—yes, I think I do. One always likes to do everything as well as one can.'

'But dancing is such an effeminate thing! For women it is very well, but men have so many better ways of distinguishing themselves. I like Englishmen because they are more manly in

their amusements than Frenchmen. A man ought to be a man; and that is why I always tell Léon to imitate the English in everything except—except in a few small particulars. He talks a great deal about your riding and shooting, and says you are *de première force* in everything of that kind.

‘Oh dear no! I don’t think I am really what you could call good at anything. I can shoot pretty fairly some days, but not by any means always; and shooting, I believe, is my chief accomplishment. You see an idle man is bound to take up all sorts of different pursuits, and it would be odd if he couldn’t succeed in any of them. I am a Jack-of-all-trades and master of none, as we say in England. Your brother thinks me a wonderful fellow because I can speak French and play the piano and paint a little; but your brother, I fancy, is rather inclined to magnify the talents of his friends. He is a little enthusiastic, isn’t he?’

‘Léon? Yes, a little: he is young,’ answered Jeanne in a tone of kind toleration, as though she and youth had nothing in common.

‘At his age,’ resumed Barrington, with that sententiousness which some of his friends occasionally found rather trying, ‘one receives impressions rather than forms judgments. A lad of twenty or twenty-one seldom sees far below the surface, and is very apt to make friends with associates who may do him incalculable harm before he finds them out.’

‘You are not speaking of yourself, I suppose?’

‘Well, no; I do not push modesty quite so far. But frankly, I do think that your brother is getting into a set here which is not likely to do him any good. I hope I don’t offend you by saying so.’

‘Not at all; on the contrary, you would do me a great kindness if you would tell me in what way you think he is in danger. He is his own master now,’ said Jeanne with a half sigh; ‘but I have still more power with him, I believe, than anyone else.’

‘Exactly. I knew that, or I should not have ventured to broach the subject. The fact is, that, if I were you, I should try to keep him away from that fellow, Saint-Luc?’

‘You do not like M. de Saint-Luc?’

‘No; I dislike him particularly. But it is not a question of liking or disliking. He might be the pleasantest fellow in existence, and yet a very bad companion for a lad just entering the world. He belongs to a class which I happen to know

something of, and which includes a great many very agreeable and entertaining people; only unfortunately they have not got a vestige of a principle among them. The first time I saw M. de Saint-Luc, I knew at once what he was—a man who would do anything, except perhaps cheat at cards.'

'I don't think he means any harm to Léon,' said Jeanne, who had a dislike to speaking ill of the absent.

'Means!—well, possibly not; but example is more powerful than intention. Then there is Madame de Trémonville. From the little I saw of her, she is another person whom I should be inclined to warn any young brother of mine against.'

'Why do you say that?' asked Jeanne sharply, wheeling round in her chair, and facing Mr. Barrington with an anxious look, which he saw, though he pretended to be still occupied with his work.

'I have no special reason,' he answered—'I am afraid I must trouble you to place yourself in the same position that you were in just now. Thank you very much. I have no particular reason for condemning Madame de Trémonville; but for all that you may take my word for it that she is not a safe friend for an impressionable young man. When you joined us, he was saying how he enjoyed life at his farm in the country; if I were you, I would induce him to go out there now for a change of air.'

'He would not do that,' answered Jeanne. 'And, besides, he has been so long away that we could not spare him again just at present. But it is kind of you to take an interest in him,' she added after a pause, 'and I shall think over what you have said.'

She dismissed the subject as a queen dismisses an audience; and Barrington, amused though he was by her unconscious imperiousness, was not bold enough to say any more. He worked on silently at the rough sketch which he had begun, indulging himself, from time to time, with a furtive study of the beautiful, composed face which showed no consciousness of his scrutiny. 'I wonder what her future will be,' he mused. 'Not an altogether happy one, I should hope; I doubt whether happiness would be becoming to her. Those great melancholy eyes and that calm sweet mouth were made to triumph over adversity, not to lose their meaning in commonplace domestic bliss. Imagine her married to a fat Frenchman, and the mother of three or four squalling brats with cropped heads—oh, odious thought! No; she must have some more exciting—more romantic history than that. I think I should prefer her to

remain unmarried—perhaps have an unfortunate attachment in early life, so as to subdue her a little, and soften down that occasional hardness of manner which is her one defect. Then she must have her share of trouble—that, no doubt, will be provided by our young friend Léon—and gradually withdraw from the world, giving herself up more and more to good works. Of course her house will always be open to receive an old friend, though—that I shall certainly require of her, and——’

At this juncture the subject of his day-dream interrupted him by remarking—

‘It is very tiring to sit so long in the same attitude. Can you not draw the balcony for a few minutes, and allow me to move? Ah, here is M. de Fontvieille. *À la bonne heure!* Now I shall be obliged to get up and shake hands with him.’

Old M. de Fontvieille, who had just appeared round the corner of the house, came forward, holding in his hand the broad-leaved Panama hat which the exigencies of the climate compelled him to wear rather against the grain. In the town, or when paying visits of ceremony, he affected the tall, very tall black hat of a bygone period of fashion, and at all times and in all places the rest of his costume was a model of scrupulous neatness.

His erect and dapper little figure was evidently not unacquainted with artful appliances in the shape of stays and padding; his tightly fitting grey trousers were strapped under a tiny pair of boots, so highly polished that it was impossible to look at them, on a sunshiny day, without blinking; and his grey moustache and imperial were carefully waxed.

As he bent over Jeanne’s outstretched hand, he threw up at her one of those languishing glances which had done terrible execution in the days when the world was forty years younger. They were innocent enough now, those speaking looks from eyes which age had long since dimmed, and were meant to express nothing more than that respectful homage which M. de Fontvieille had never in his life failed to render to any member of the fair sex, whether old or young, plain or pretty. The old gentleman had retained the manner, as well as the costume, of a youth which had been prolonged beyond the limits of middle age, and ogled grandmothers and grandchildren with perfect impartiality.

‘I have been paying my respects to Madame la Duchesse,’ he said; ‘and I have made her promise to come out into the garden shortly to enjoy this divine sunshine. She left me in the

drawing-room, saying that she would put on her bonnet and return in two minutes. I waited for her half an hour, and then, as I was beginning to tire of my own company, I thought I might venture to step round and wish you good-morning. So you are about to be immortalised, Jeanne? Will you do me the honour to present me to monsieur?’

Barrington rose and bowed, as Jeanne made the requested introduction, and M. de Fontvieille bent his grey head till it was almost in a line with his knees, and brushed the gravel with a backward sweep of his Panama hat.

‘You are an amateur artist, monsieur?’ said the elder gentleman. ‘I envy you your talent: you are in a country which should be the paradise of artists; and you have a magnificent landscape before you. May I be permitted to glance at your canvas?’

‘Certainly,’ answered Barrington, standing back to allow the other to approach his easel; ‘but it is not precisely the landscape that I propose to paint. As you see by the rough sketch before you, I am attempting nothing more ambitious than a *souvenir* of this exquisite old building; and mademoiselle has very kindly consented to let me have a likeness of herself in the foreground.’

‘Ah, I perceive,’ said the old gentleman, peering inquisitively at the outline through his double eye-glass—‘a study of the Campagne and mademoiselle; or perhaps I ought rather to say, of mademoiselle and the Campagne. Both charming subjects, monsieur, and I admire your taste in having accorded the largest portion of your space to the more deserving of the two.’

‘Mademoiselle is in the foreground,’ began Barrington, explanatorily.

‘Naturally. It would have been impolite to place her anywhere else,’ returned M. de Fontvieille, with a twinkle in his eye. ‘Do you paint in oils or in water-colours, monsieur?’

‘In oils.’

‘Ah! and that requires many sittings, does it not?—a picture in oils.’

Barrington answered vaguely that it was impossible to fix in advance the time required for the completion of any picture; and then, to his relief, the Duchess joined the group, leaning upon her stick, and M. de Fontvieille desisted from his queries.

The two old people went away together presently, and began a steady, slow promenade up and down over the gravel

walks, while Barrington returned to his work, and Jeanne to her reflections.

‘And how does the *affaire* Saint-Luc progress?’ inquired M. de Fontvieille, as soon as he and his old friend were out of earshot.

The Duchess made a grimace. ‘As far as I can see, it does not progress at all,’ she answered. ‘You know how perverse Jeanne is; it is mere waste of time and temper to attempt to influence her. Happily M. de Saint-Luc is of a very patient disposition; and, moreover, he is desperately in love with the girl. I trust in time, and say nothing; but I wish the matter could be settled one way or the other. At my age, Time is an uncertain friend; I may have to part with him for ever before I am a year older, and then what is to become of Jeanne? Ah, the poor old Marquis! If he had not taken it into his head to marry an Englishwoman, how much trouble we might all have been spared!’

‘Jeanne, for one, would have been spared the trouble of existence,’ observed M. de Fontvieille. ‘Her father’s marriage may have been no blessing for her; but it has provided you and me, madame, with an interest for our old age. Does M. de Saint-Luc come here often?’

‘No, not very often. He is ceremonious, and will not visit us without an invitation. Certainly he is invited tolerably frequently; but then, you understand, it is I who ask him, and he is not always well received.’

‘It is a pity,’ remarked M. de Fontvieille, meditatively, with a glance in the direction of the house, where Barrington and Jeanne were to be seen apparently engaged in animated conversation—‘it is a pity that M. de Saint-Luc is not an artist.’

‘Ah, bah!’ returned the Duchess, following his look and his thought; ‘there is no danger Jeanne, if she is deficient in some good qualities, has at least that of common sense; and that Mr. Barrington (who, *par parenthèse*, is a much better informed and more agreeable person than most of his compatriots) is no longer young enough to make a fool of himself. Everybody knows that mixed marriages always end in misery. If, however, you have any fears,’ she added with a short sardonic laugh, ‘I will tell Jeanne that the Englishman is an excellent *parti*, and that I have a high opinion of him. That will dispose of him effectually.’

‘He is rich, they say.’

‘My dear monsieur, of what are you dreaming? If he had all the wealth of the Rothschilds, do you suppose that would make any difference? No, no! we have had enough of English marriages in the De Mersac family. But I tell you there is no danger at all. Come, let us talk of something else. I am weary of vexing myself, night and day, with the question of Jeanne’s future.’

‘The future? My dear madame, we have reached an age—you and I—at which most mortals cease to have any control over future events, and retain very little over present ones. We have acted our part and said our say in this world, and must now stand aside to make room for a younger generation. All that we can do is to offer good advice—which we may be pretty sure will not be accepted. Did you act upon advice when you were young, madame? For my part, nothing short of coercion had any influence upon me; and Jeanne is not precisely a person to be coerced. Why, then, vex yourself? Jeanne will take her own way, and very likely it will not be a bad way. Only, if I were in your place, and if I were determined that she should marry M. de Saint-Luc, I should seriously recommend that gentleman to develop a talent for drawing. But I see that the subject is displeasing to you; pardon me if I have been indiscreet in pursuing it.’ M. de Fontvieille stood still in the gravel path, took off his hat, and bowed profoundly as he made this apology.

‘Will you come now and see my sapphires?’ he continued. ‘They are good stones—that I know; but I want the benefit of your taste as to the best setting for them.’

M. de Fontvieille had for some years been the tenant of the neighbouring villa, which the Duchess had taken upon her first arrival at Algiers, and which she had occupied up to the time of the old Marquis’s death. He had filled the house with curiosities and works of art of one kind and another, being a well-to-do old gentleman, and having some difficulty in disposing of the superfluity of his income; but his chief craze was his collection of precious stones. These, the possession of which was doubly dear to him by reason of many a well-remembered haggles and protracted bargain preceding their purchase, he kept in certain strong boxes fitted, for that purpose, with velvet-covered trays, and exhibited, with just pride, to appreciative friends.

‘What? More gems!’ cried the Duchess. ‘You will ruin yourself, my friend; and, one of these fine mornings, your

servant will murder you, and run away with your treasures. I will see the sapphires, though : I am not too old to take delight in looking at pretty things.'

So the two old people disappeared from the garden ; and were a considerable time absent ; for, once the boxes were unlocked, neither of them could resist going through the entire collection. When they returned, the western sky was flooded with a glow of orange light, upon which tiny golden cloudlets floated ; the flower-beds were barred with long black shadows from the cypresses, and the air was sharp with the chill which in southern latitudes invariably heralds the sunset. Jeanne had left her post in the verandah, and was standing beside the artist, who had already packed up his easel, paint-box, and other belongings.

'Mademoiselle is going to introduce me to her live stock,' said the latter.

'Oh, indeed,' answered the Duchess. 'Are you fond of animals, Mr. Barrington ?'

'Devoted to them.'

'*Ma foi !* then I envy you your taste. If I could share it my life would be far pleasanter than it is ; but unluckily for me, I have never had any love for menageries. That dog Turco is bad enough : he keeps me in constant terror by his habit of bouncing out unexpectedly from behind doors, and upsetting the unwary ; but he is an angel in comparison with the wild boar, or with Jeanne's jackal, whom we call Jérémie on account of his ceaseless lamentations. Do you know what it is, monsieur, to be kept awake, the whole night through, by the howling of a jackal ? But of course you do not. If a jackal howled under your window, you would take a gun, in the course of five minutes, and go out and kill him. That is also what I should do if I were a man ; but being only an old woman, and timid of fire-arms, I have to lie still, and listen to the senseless cries of that evil beast till I'm almost maddened, and——'

'I had no idea that you could hear him on your side of the house, madame,' interposed Jeanne apologetically. 'If he disturbs you, we will send him away into the country.'

'Useless, dear child ! His empty kennel would remain, and neither you nor Léon would allow it to stand long unoccupied. I prefer present known evils to future indefinite ones. Would you believe, monsieur, that we once had a hyæna chained in the backyard for three days ? On the fourth day he broke

loose, and was found at night scratching at the graves in the churchyard. Imagine what a scandal. He was summarily put to death. As for that depraved Jérémie, I have become accustomed to him after a fashion; and how do I know what his successor might be? Very probably a porcupine, who would wander about the house, and who would be sure to take a delight in remaining motionless whenever I entered one of those dark rooms, so that I might take him for a divan, and seat myself upon him. But I must not keep you standing any longer in this chilly air. You will excuse me, I am sure, if I do not offer to accompany you to the yard.'

And so the old lady vanished through the doorway, followed by M. de Fontvieille, who, after a moment's hesitation between dread of rheumatism and doubt as to the prudence of leaving Jeanne alone any longer with the Englishman, found the former consideration the weightier of the two, and yielded to it accordingly.

Barrington was very willing to excuse both the old people. He followed Jeanne across the courtyard to the stable, whose tenants squealed and hinnied, as only Arab horses can, at the entrance of their mistress; was presented to the unattractive Jérémie, to the wild boar, to numerous dogs, and finally to a pair of beautiful soft-eyed gazelles, the male of whom no sooner espied the stranger than, with a grunt of defiance, he put his head down, dashed at him like an express train, and would probably have succeeded in producing a humiliating catastrophe, had not his mistress caught him deftly by the horns in mid-career, and held him captive in her strong white hands.

Shortly afterwards Barrington took his leave, having obtained permission to return on the following day and set to work in earnest upon his picture.

In a letter which he addressed, about this time, to the same friend at whose correspondence we have already had a glimpse, occurs, *inter alia*, the following passage:—

'It is a great mistake to suppose, as many people do, that feminine beauty of form consists solely in rounded outlines, and that any appearance of strength is a defect in a woman. I hate fat arms, and flabby, dimpled, powerless hands. Nature no more intended hands and arms to look like that than she intended a prize pig to be so heavy that his legs will not support his weight. Women ought to be able to use their limbs freely. And if ever you meet a beautiful girl with strong wrists in whom you feel an interest, take my advice and buy

her a gazelle—or if you can't get a gazelle, perhaps a billy-goat might do. Encourage the beast to charge at her, and teach her to catch him neatly by the horns when he is going full tilt. Of course he will bowl her over as clean as a whistle at first, but she mustn't mind that. Once she has acquired the knack of seizing him at the right moment, she will find the result will be worth any bruises he may have given her in teaching her the lesson; and it will be worth ten times the money you have paid for him to see the picture the girl will make as she holds the struggling brute in a perfectly firm grasp, but without any unbecoming exertion.'

CHAPTER VIII.

MADAME DE TRÉMONVILLE AT HOME.

THE grave, silent Arabs, who, with their long strings of camels, leave Algiers by the Bab-Azoun, and following the curve of the bay, set their faces in a south-easterly direction; the sturdy Kabyles, trudging towards their native mountains, with money, well earned by a month or so of hard labour in the town, in their purses; the farmers and butchers, on their way to the great weekly cattle-market at Bouffarik; the strangers, whose guide-books command them to visit Blidah and the far-famed Gorge of the Chiffa—all these, before they have well accomplished three miles of their journey, pass, on their left hand, a pleasant, shady domain, where avenues of palm and plane and eucalyptus, parterres gay with many-tinted flowers, and cool, dark vistas, at the edge of which a glint of foam shows where the breakers meet the shore, might tempt the wayfarer to turn aside out of the heat and dust, and rest awhile, if the exigencies of business permitted of such delay. This property, which bears the modest title of the 'Jardin d'Essai,' was set aside by the French Government, shortly after the conquest of Algiers, for the establishment of a great nursery-garden, and for the acclimatisation of tropical plants. It has answered its purpose well; and at the present time it is not only a boon to colonists, but a charming, cool retreat, where lazy people can dream away an hour or two in that contentment of idleness which can only be enjoyed in its perfection under southern skies.

Thither wandered M. de Saint Luc, on a warm, still after-

noon ; and seating himself at the end of one of the alleys, fell, as of late it had become habitual to him to do, into a melancholy reverie. From the point at which he had taken up his position the shore took an inward sweep, so that a broad stretch of blue and glittering sea intervened between him and the town of Algiers, which rose abruptly from the water, white and dazzling, like a city of marble, against its green background.

Saint-Luc surveyed the prospect with a sigh. His thoughts reverted to the time—infinately remote, as it now seemed—when, as a gay young *Chasseur d’Afrique*, without much money to spend, but with a fine stock of health and animal spirits, he had fought in Kabylia under old Marshal Randon, and when, the campaign being ended, he had been ordered to Algiers with his regiment, and had come in sight of the town on just such a fine afternoon as this. There had been a good deal of laughing and joking between him and his brother officers, he remembered—much mutual congratulation upon their safe return to civilised luxuries ; and it had been agreed that they were to treat themselves that evening to the best dinner that Algiers could produce, and to go to the theatre afterwards. But he had not gone to either dinner or theatre ; for, on his arrival, a letter had been handed to him which briefly announced that his old father was dead, and had left him a rich man.

‘It was my last day of happiness,’ sighed Saint-Luc, forgetful of the commencement of his Parisian career, which had been merry enough until satiety had robbed it of its charm. ‘When I sailed for France, I left my youth behind me, and never knew what I had lost till it was far past retrieving. Ah ! if I had met her then ! Or if I could be young now !’ How many years was it since Saint-Luc and his comrades had ridden gallantly home from the hill country of the discomfited Kabyles ? How many years ? And how much had they held that a man could look back upon with any kind of comfort or pride ? Once he had broken his right arm in a steeple-chase at La Marche, and had scrambled on to his horse again and won the race, amidst roars of applause ; once he had broken the bank at Baden ; and once he had disarmed the famous Duc de Chaumont St.-Hilaire in a duel. These were his triumphs ; and time had been when he had contemplated them with some self-approval. In his present mood, he recalled them with profound disgust. Such feats might command the homage of a Madame de Trémonville ; but with Jeanne, as he knew, they were not likely to count for much.

‘She despises me,’ he thought; ‘and *parbleu* ! I am inclined to share in her sentiments. If she felt any admiration for me, it is I who should despise her. What right have I to expect that she, in her proud purity, should stoop to marry a half-ruined spendthrift? The wisest thing I could do would be to take myself off back to France—only that is no longer possible. I must wait on, and take my dismissal from her own lips. It will not kill me—but I wish I had illusions enough left to be able to believe that it would !’

The sound of approaching wheels interrupted his dismal self-communing, and at the same moment he heard himself called by name.

Léon de Mersac, driving a low pony-carriage, had pulled up a few yards from the dreamer, and was contemplating him in undisguised astonishment.

‘You here !’ he exclaimed. ‘What in the world are you doing in the Jardin d’Essai, all by yourself?’

‘I am doing nothing,’ answered Saint-Luc, getting up. ‘It is the habit of the country, is it not?’

‘It is not my habit,’ said Léon; ‘I have always plenty to do—too much even. For instance, I ought to be at the market at Bouffarik to day; instead of which, I have to go and call upon Madame de Trémonville. Will you come?’

‘I would rather send my card by you.’

Léon shook his head. ‘She would not like that. She always expects her friends to call in person.’

‘Am I one of her friends? I did not know it,’ said Saint-Luc; ‘but if I must go, I may as well go with you. And by-the-by, Léon,’ he added, as he seated himself in the pony-carriage, ‘I was thinking of saying a word or two to you about that lady, if you will not think it too great a liberty.’

‘Say what you please. I shall think nothing a liberty that comes from you,’ answered Léon politely.

‘I am going to make you angry, nevertheless. Well, you must try to forgive me. Do you know that this good Madame de Trémonville is amusing herself by trying to make a fool of you?’

‘No,’ answered Léon decidedly; ‘I do not know it. You misunderstand her; and I am not surprised at your doing so, for she is fond of admiration, like all women who are young and pretty; but she is not a coquette. If you were as well acquainted with her as I am, you would have no feeling towards her but one of the deepest compassion; for, though

perhaps you might not suppose it from seeing her in public, she is very unhappy.'

'So those perennial smiles, and that charming flow of animation, only disguise an aching heart. How sad!'

'It is easy to sneer,' returned Léon; 'but what would you have her do? Would you prefer that she should go about moaning, and depress everybody by showing a dismal face?'

'Certainly not. I was only admiring the fortitude with which she bears the neglect of an unsympathetic husband—for that, I presume, is the affliction she suffers from.'

'How did you guess that?' exclaimed Léon, quite astonished at this striking proof of Saint-Luc's penetration. 'But, to be sure, anybody might see how ill-suited to her that dull, vulgar old man is. They have not a thought nor a taste in common; and he treats her with the most ostentatious indifference. Sometimes, when she speaks of him, she cannot restrain her tears.'

'And you dry them for her? *Allons, allons*, my friend; you are accepting a part in a very old comedy. It is one that I have played more than once myself, and I know it by heart. If my own past life gave me the right to offer counsel to a young man, I should recommend you to decline such a rôle, though it involves little risk, except that of exhibiting yourself in a somewhat ridiculous aspect to your friends, so long as you remember that you are merely acting. But if you take it into your head to be in earnest over the affair, the case is different, and you may incur a good deal of needless unhappiness. Whatever you do, don't take Madame de Trémonville seriously. Believe me, she is not worth it, and does not expect it. Amuse yourself with her, if you must; but don't put faith in all she says; above all, don't be absurd enough to fall in love with her. Formerly there were two classes of women—*dévotés* and women of the world: one knew what to expect of each of them, and suited one's conduct towards them accordingly; but in these days a third class has sprung up, and is becoming more numerous than either of the others—a class of women who are worldly without being witty; whose religion, of which they make a conspicuous display, is nothing but a superstition; who are mostly very ignorant, who have no merit, except that of dressing well, and no passions but vanity and a certain mean ambition. It is a mass of such charming creatures that forms the upper layer of fashionable society in France, under his Majesty Napoleon III., whom Heaven preserve! There are

exceptions here and there, of course, but I am much mistaken if your Madame de Trémonville is one of them.'

'You are a man of the world,' said Léon, 'and naturally know more of the state of society at large than I can pretend to do. Also, like most men of the world, you have a habit of generalising which is apt to lead you into errors with regard to individuals. You are altogether wrong, for instance, in your judgment of Madame de Trémonville, who is neither ignorant, nor vain, nor irreligious. But you can discover her true character for yourself, if you care to take the trouble: I have no particular wish to influence your opinion.'

'As you please. Let us admit her to be an angel. I still don't see what good result you propose to gain by making love to her.'

'I propose nothing, and I am not making love to her,' answered Léon, flicking the near pony impatiently with his whip. 'And with your permission, I should prefer to change the subject.'

'I told you I should make you angry,' remarked Saint-Luc, as the carriage turned in at Madame de Trémonville's gates.

'I am not in the least angry,' returned Léon; 'but I see no use in discussing a state of affairs which does not exist—that is all.'

And so he pulled up at the door of the villa; and Saint-Luc, with the conviction, common to most wise counsellors, that he might as well have held his tongue, got out and rang the bell.

The visitors were at once admitted into the presence of the lady of the house, whom they found sitting on a footstool, surrounded by officers in staff-uniforms, all of whom were busily engaged in tearing up newspapers into small scraps.

Ah messieurs! you arrive *à propos*,' she cried. 'You shall take part in our *chasse*. M. de Saint-Luc, you, no doubt, are already acquainted with the rules of the game. A bag full of paper is given to one of the party, who represents the hare, and who starts in any direction he pleases, scattering the paper behind him. The rest, who act as hounds, follow, after the interval of a minute, upon his track, and the chase continues till the hare is caught, or the scent exhausted. The hare, if he is captured, pays fifty francs into the box which you see, for the benefit of the poor; if, on the other hand, he escape, each of the hounds must contribute twenty francs to the same object. There is also a fine of twenty francs for any hound who leaves the scent, or gives up the pursuit.'

In this manner Madame de Trémonville combined amusement with benevolence. It has already been said that she was not averse to such forms of romping as she conceived to be sanctioned by the decrees of fashion; and this notion of a paper-chase, wafted to her by some echo from Compiègne, had taken her fancy as well as that of her admirers. 'It will be no novelty to you, monsieur,' she continued, addressing Saint-Luc; 'but you will hardly expect to meet with novelty in our barbarous colony. It is something to do—one runs about and one laughs—*voilà!*'

It struck Saint-Luc as possible that one might sit still and laugh, or even sit still without laughing; either of which alternatives he would have preferred to the one suggested to him; but he was not so ungracious as to give utterance to his sentiments, and began to tear up paper with polite resignation.

'Will not you sing us something, madame, while we prepare the scent?' asked one of the officers; and Madame de Trémonville consented, without waiting to be pressed. She seated herself at the piano, and sang, with a good deal of spirit, a ballad, the words of which were hardly open to objection, though there was something in the manner of their delivery which the performer mentally qualified as '*chic*,' and her audience as '*risqué*.'

The officers glanced at one another and smiled furtively; Saint-Luc preserved a countenance of blank impassibility; but Léon, mindful of the conversation which had occupied his drive from the Jardin d'Essai, reddened and frowned.

Madame de Trémonville was not slow to detect these signs of displeasure. 'Look at M. de Mersac!' she cried. 'He is actually blushing for me. And yet I had chosen the most innocent song in my *répertoire*, out of special deference to his prejudices. M. le Marquis has lately become of a simplicity quite Arcadian. I think even that his thoughts wander sometimes to some shepherdess or other—is it not so, monsieur? Ah! you blush still more. I would stake my diamond ring against the straw hat whose brim you are trying to pull off, that you are in love.'

'Then you would lose your ring, madame. I beg to assure you that I am not in the very least in love with any human creature.'

Madame de Trémonville laughed. 'You speak with such emphasis that we must believe you,' she said; 'but you need not be angry. It is no disgrace to be in love; is it, M. de Longueil? You ought to know.'

‘I hope not; I know it is a misfortune,’ replied the officer addressed, with a languishing look at his hostess.

‘M. de Longueil is always in love, and is always successful—at least, so he says,’ continued the lady. ‘Ah! these *beaux sabreurs*! who can withstand them? Since his Mexican campaign, M. de Longueil has been irresistible.’

The young man, who in truth had been invalided home almost immediately after his landing in Mexico, and had had to put up with some good-humoured raillery from his comrades on the subject, winced perceptibly under this unexpected attack, to the great joy of his assailant. She liked to say occasional sharp things to her adorers, to hurt their feelings, and set them against one another. It was her way of paying them out for the free-and-easy fashion in which they usually treated her; and she was the more able to indulge her taste, inasmuch as she was perfectly well aware that she could at any moment, with a slight effort, disperse the clouds which her remarks might have called up. She soon found means to restore M. de Longueil to good humour; and, seeing that Léon still sat, silent and sulky, by himself, she took an opportunity to cross the room to him, and whisper confidentially, ‘They are so scandalous—they had remarked that you were constantly here. I was obliged to say something to divert their suspicions.’

Whereupon that infatuated youth immediately recovered his spirits, and joined in the general entreaty that the paper-chase might now be allowed to begin.

Lots were drawn to decide who should first act as hare, and the lot fell upon M. de Longueil. He took up his bag and started at once through the open door, and they heard his footsteps dying away on the gravel outside, while Madame de Trémouville, watch in hand, awaited the expiration of the stipulated minute. Then, time being up, the whole party set out in hot pursuit, keeping scrupulously to the scent, and imitating, with indifferent success, the baying of a pack in full cry. Out into the blazing sunshine they rushed, helter-skelter, down the slope of the garden, through a hedge of aloes, into a narrow shady lane, still paved with the slabs which the Romans had left there in the days of Julius Cæsar; then up the hill again, panting and laughing, across a meadow, through another hedge or two, over a low wall, into the chinks of which the affrighted lizards darted, and so back to their starting-point. Madame de Trémouville kept the lead with Léon at her elbow; the others were close behind; and far in the rear Saint-Luc, who

had no special aptitude for playing the fool, trotted resignedly, emitting from time to time, as in duty bound, a brief, mournful bark. The hare was now in sight, and, confident in his powers of outstripping his pursuers, began to amuse himself by doubling, passing within a foot or two of the distressed pack, and stimulating their ardour with sundry insulting jeers. But his triumph was short. Looking over his shoulder to fling back a derisive shout, he stumbled on the edge of a flower-bed, and, falling prone into a cluster of rose-bushes, was ignominiously captured by Madame de Trémonville, to whom he ruefully handed over his fine of fifty francs.

Fate now selected as victim M. de Saint-Luc, who promptly offered to pay fine in default; but this proposition being received with marked disfavour, he was fain to accept the bag of paper handed to him; his disgust being somewhat mitigated by the permission accorded to his request that he might, if he so pleased, confine his progress to the house. For he thought, 'So long as I remain within four walls, I shall at least escape the risk of sunstroke, and, what is more important, I shall be in no danger of being seen in this very ridiculous position by any chance acquaintance who may be passing in the neighbourhood.'

He left behind him, therefore, a tortuous track, leading now into one room, now into another, out into the verandah and back again, and finally up the staircase. It was not until he had darted in and out of M. de Trémonville's dressing-room, and was becoming hard pressed by the hounds, who, with shouts of laughter, were following closely upon his heels, that a happy inspiration occurred to him. Why should he not escape from the house, run down to the high road, beyond which nobody would be likely to follow him, and so slip quietly down home? Full of this idea, he dashed down the stairs, three steps at the time, flung open the front door, and—plunged headlong into the arms of Madame de Vaublanc, who, in her very best clothes, was coming to pay a visit of ceremony after the ball.

'*Mais, monsieur!*' shrieked that astonished lady, reeling back and involuntarily ringing a tremendous peal with the bell-handle which she had grasped for support.

Saint-Luc felt it to be rather hard luck that Madame de Vaublanc should have chosen that day of all others for paying her respects at the Villa de Trémonville; but it was worse that she should have brought Mademoiselle de Mersac with her; and what was worst of all was, that his lively hostess,

unconscious of the appearance of any fresh personages upon the scene, must needs bounce out through the half-open door, and fling her arms round him with a cry of triumph. Léon, who, as usual, was following close upon her heels, opened his mouth to re-echo the shout, but shut it again abruptly when he became aware of his sister's calm brown eyes fixed upon him in wondering interrogation. The rest of the pack, having had time to perceive the state of affairs, quietly and discreetly vanished.

There was a brief, uncomfortable pause, during which the five persons who stood face to face in the full light of the sinking sun, contemplated one another with varied feelings. Léon looked, as he felt, very much like a schoolboy caught out of bounds; Madame de Trémonville, for once in her life, was a little disconcerted; Saint-Luc leant against the wall, with folded arms, the picture of calm despair; and Jeanne, remembering the promise she had extorted from this unfortunate delinquent, was at no pains to hide the disgust and contempt with which his duplicity filled her. Only Madame de Vau-blanc, scrutinising the flushed cheeks and disordered hair of her enemy, smiled with grim satisfaction, and sang an inward psalm at the shrine of Nemesis the Just.

‘An orgy, mesdames—a veritable orgy!’ she hissed, describing the scene subsequently to an eager circle of listeners. ‘If you had seen her, with her hair down her back and her eyes blazing, clutch M. de Saint-Luc round the neck, you would have thought, as I declare I did for a moment, that she had gone out of her mind. The poor Vicomte, who did not appear to enjoy his position, fumbled in his pocket and handed her two or three napoleons. It was to save himself from some penalty, I presume—though what worse punishment he could have feared than being embraced by that woman, I do not pretend to say. You will easily believe that I declined to enter the house, though she recovered herself, after a minute, and begged us to do so, suggesting even, in the insolent manner that you know of, that we should join in the game we had interrupted. “Many thanks, madame,” said I; “but, from what I have seen of your game, it seems to me to be one fitted neither for old women nor for young girls!” And with that I took my leave. The two gentlemen followed immediately, and caught us up before we were out of the avenue. I was glad to see that they both looked very much ashamed of themselves.’

Ashamed of themselves they undoubtedly were, but in very

different degrees of intensity. Léon's humiliation was lessened by a strong admixture of that odd pride which youths of all nations would appear to take in publicly exposing their idiocy where a pretty woman is concerned; whereas that of Saint-Luc contained no consoling element whatever, and was the more bitter because he felt it to be wholly undeserved.

It was in the hope of exculpating himself in some degree, that he hurried after Madame de Vaublanc and Jeanne.

'You are taking the wrong turning, M. de Saint-Luc, said the latter lady. 'Our road leads directly away from the town.'

'I am going to make my way back by El Biar and the Frais Vallon,' he explained. 'It is a much prettier walk.'

To this Jeanne vouchsafed no rejoinder; and, somehow or other, Saint-Luc found himself presently walking beside slow-paced Madame de Vaublanc, while the two tall figures of Mademoiselle de Mersac and her brother were drawing rapidly away in front. It is highly improbable that he would have got speech of Jeanne again that day, if the old lady at his side had not happened to be cognisant of the Duchess's wishes with respect to him, and a staunch supporter of them. As it was, she soon gave him his opportunity.

'Stop, my children, stop!' she cried, when they reached the entrance of a narrow stony lane; 'let us take the short cut.'

'You will find it rough walking, madame,' said Jeanne, doubtfully.

'Eh, *mon Dieu!* I prefer spoiling my boots to making a circuit of two miles. M. le Marquis will kindly lend me the support of his arm, I have no doubt.'

And so, the path being too narrow to admit of more than two persons walking abreast, Jeanne had to fall back, and accept Saint-Luc's society, whether she liked it or not. Silently they scrambled over the rocks and boulders, Saint-Luc offering an assisting hand from time to time, and being as often politely but firmly waved aside. At length he stopped short, and faced his companion.

'Mademoiselle,' said he.

'Monsieur.'

'You are angry with me.'

'I assure you I was not thinking about you.'

She looked down upon him from the rocky ledge upon which she was standing. A tangled growth of cactus and

myrtle and asphodel, overspread with festoons of the pale green clematis, rose behind her, and from between the silvery leaves of the olive-tree over her head rays of sunlight streamed down and made moving patterns of light and shade upon her white dress. Her beautiful lips were curved into a smile of innocent candour, into which a touch of perfect disdain had somehow found its way. It was not the least strange feature in Saint-Luc's infatuation that the small stabs which Jeanne was always inflicting upon him never angered but only hurt him. In the old Paris days he had not borne the reputation of a man easily snubbed, and had never failed to hold his own against any man or woman who had shown a disposition to attack him; but he had no retort ready now, and had no wish to seek for one. He resumed, quite humbly, 'I ought perhaps to have said that, as far as appearances go, you have reason to be angry with me. I promised, you know, to try and keep your brother away from Madame de Trémonville, and in truth I have done what I could. I was speaking to him about her this very afternoon, and my visit to her was meant to be as much one of ceremony as your own. I certainly should not have gone, if I had had any idea that I should be forced into playing that ridiculous game.'

'Why should you not play any game that you find amusing?' returned Jeanne, indifferently. 'It was foolish in me to speak to you about Léon and Madame de Trémonville at all. Will you please forget that I ever said anything upon the subject?'

'Just as you please, mademoiselle; but why do you say that your speaking to me was foolish?'

'I will say useless, if you prefer it. Pray let us talk no more about it.'

Saint-Luc was silent for a few minutes; then he broke out abruptly—'Why do you mistrust me so, mademoiselle? I could not prevent your brother from calling upon Madame de Trémonville this afternoon. I told him what I thought of her, and advised him to drop her acquaintance. What more could I, or anyone, do? I have been unfortunate enough to incur your dislike: I have seen that for some time, and have no right to complain of it; but at least I have never given you any reason to suppose that I do not tell the truth. What makes you think so ill of me?'

Jeanne had resumed her march; but she faced about upon this challenge. 'It is not that I dislike or distrust you, M. de

Saint-Luc,' she said ; 'and I don't think that you mean unkindly towards Léon ; but sometimes I feel afraid for him—he has changed so much of late. After what you have said, I am sure that you have done your best to warn him, though I confess I did not think so just now. But I suppose the truth is, that Léon has reached an age at which warnings are not of much service. He is at an age, too, when young men generally imitate those about them.'

'I understand. And I am not an example to be imitated. You are perfectly right, mademoiselle ; no one could have wasted his life more hopelessly than I have done ; also no one could be more conscious of his worthlessness than I am. At the same time, I don't think your brother has learnt much harm from me since I have been here. The only bad habit of any sort or kind that he has seen me indulge in is occasional gambling, and if you wish it, I will gladly promise you now never to touch a card again so long as I am in Algiers.'

'No, no !' she interrupted hastily ; 'let us have no promises. Who knows whether it would be possible to keep them ? I cannot expect you to change all your habits to suit my convenience ; and, indeed, I should not wish it. We will try to be better friends for the future,' she added, extending her hand to him frankly.

He took it, held it in his own for a second, and then let it fall. It was probably the very first time in his life that he had allowed a woman's hand to escape from his possession without a pressure.

'You know that the will is not wanting on my part,' he answered, in a low voice.

Her brow clouded, but cleared again almost at once, and she looked at him not unkindly.

'I wish——' she began, and then broke off.

And Saint-Luc never knew in what manner she had intended to finish her sentence ; for at that moment Madame de Vaublanc's shrill voice was heard calling, 'Jeanne, make haste ! you will keep Madame la Duchesse waiting for dinner.' And so the colloquy came to an end.

CHAPTER IX.

GRANDE KABYLIE.

IN selecting for narration a portion out of the lives of certain people, and endeavouring to interest others therein, the veracious historian is apt, ere long, to find himself hemmed in between two difficulties. For whereas if, upon the one hand, he attempt to follow the subjects of his story through those uneventful scenes in which, generally speaking, their desires, their characters, and their destinies slowly develop themselves, he is in danger of becoming tedious to his readers, it is certain, upon the other, that if he pass over such periods in silence, he must risk the charge of inconsequence. The former peril appearing, all things considered, the more formidable of the two, it seems wisest to the present chronicler to dismiss in a few sentences as may be all account of the months of April and May, 1870—precisely the two months, as it happens, of which the personages with whom he is concerned have since declared that they cherish a keener, fonder memory than of any other period of their career.

The fact is, that nothing whatever took place during these two months but what might have been anticipated from the outset. Barrington finished his picture, began a second one, and established himself upon a footing of complete intimacy at the Campagne de Mersac; Léon went on flirting foolishly with Madame de Trémonville; Saint-Luc, though more at his ease with Jeanne, and more kindly received by her after the conversation recorded in the last chapter, made but little advance towards the fulfilment of his hopes; the Duchess and M. de Fontvieille continued their abortive support of the luckless suitor; and old Time plodded on in his dogged, relentless way, bringing all of them nearer and nearer to the inevitable end. Here is an extract from Barrington's correspondence—the last with which the reader shall be troubled—whence the results of eight weeks of glorious weather, combined with lamentable supineness on the part of those who should have been able to exercise some control over the march of events, may be succinctly gleaned.

‘Your last letter tickled me immensely. That you should claim credit for penetration in having discovered the very thing

that I have been laboriously striving for some time past to make clear to you, is such a good joke that I am sure you will never see the point of it. "Mark my words," you observe in that pithy and sagacious style which is all your own, "you are falling in love with that Mademoiselle Thingummy; and if I don't see you home before the Derby is run, I shall look upon your case as a hopeless one!" I had been laughing at your letter from the commencement; but when I reached that sentence, I positively roared. Why, my dear, good soul, of course I am in love with Mademoiselle de Mersac (of whom, by the way, I will thank you not to speak as "Mademoiselle Thingummy" again). The indisputable fact that nobody could be as much in her society as I have been without falling in love with her, is one with which you cannot be expected to be acquainted; but if you haven't burnt my previous letters, and will refer back to them, you will surely admit that I have never drawn the thinnest veil over my attachment—or at least, if I have (for I don't exactly remember all I may have said), it has been one that any fool might have seen through. Heavens and earth! what is it that makes people talk of love as though there were something ridiculous in it—something to be ashamed of? Is it ignorance, or folly, or envy? Ignorance it cannot be, for everybody must have been in love at least once; in your case, I should imagine it to be a mixture of the two latter causes. Come, old fellow, you and I have been friends ever since we wore jackets and turn-down collars, and played fives against the chapel-wall on Saturday afternoons, because we were too small to be allowed possession of one of the fives-courts: we have wintered one another and summered one another, and I have a right to put any question I please to you, and to expect a truthful reply. Divest yourself for a few minutes of your twopenny-halfpenny cynicism, and tell me honestly—Wouldn't you give a year's income to be in love yourself? Wouldn't your heart leap with joy if you could feel again the delicious tremors, the exquisite joys, the doubts, the fears, the hopes of bygone days? Wouldn't you, if you could choose to live again, in a queer, delightful, glorified world, inhabited, for all practical purposes, by one person only besides yourself? Wouldn't you, on the approach of that person, like to experience a certain odd spasm, half painful, half delightful, somewhere about the middle of your waistcoat?—it is a physical sensation, and you know it as well as I do, if your memory is not growing feeble. Ah, my dear old boy, there's

nothing half so sweet in life as love's young dream ! Love's middle-aged dream is a very close imitation of it—*experito crede* ! Oh, talk not to me of a name great in story ! What are honours and wealth and gratified ambition in comparison with this divine ecstasy ? It is a disease, you will grunt. I don't say no ; but it is sent straight from heaven.

Oh, Fame, if I e'er took delight in thy praises,
'Twas less for the sake of thy high-sounding phrases
Than to see the bright eyes of the dear one discover
She thought that I was not unworthy to love her.

You will perhaps pardon my bursting into poetry ; it is a trick incidental to my condition. I see you reading this in your armchair at the club, doubled up with merriment, your long nose almost touching your chin, as it does in moments when you are enjoying a fancied superiority over one of your fellow-creatures. My dear fellow, you are most heartily welcome to your joke. Your correspondence is often so irresistibly comical to me, that it would be hard indeed if I were to grudge you an occasional chuckle ; and in the present instance I can't help thinking that I have the best of the laugh.

'Yes, I am in love with Jeanne de Mersac ; and I rejoice in being so ! Your sage and trite warnings against what you are pleased to term a "romantic marriage with a foreigner," and your doubts as to how a Frenchwoman and a Catholic would be received by the society of Surrey, are altogether irrelevant to the subject, and I am not going to discuss their soundness. The notion that love and marriage are inseparably connected, and that the one is invariably and necessarily a prelude to the other, always seems to me to arise out of a certain vulgarity of mind. You, who are nothing if not conventional, probably hold a different opinion ; but really, if you will think for a moment of the refining, ennobling influence of love—of how it takes us out of ourselves and raises us above the level of this commonplace, sordid world ; and if you will then consider the perfectly earthly character of marriage, with its dull respectabilities and tedious monotony—you will perceive the bathos of degrading the former into a mere stepping-stone towards the latter.

Ach ! des Lebens schönste Feier
Endigt auch den Lebensmai,
Mit dem Gürtel, mit dem Schleier
Reizt der schöne Wahn entzwei !

I don't, of course, mean to assert that a man should not marry the woman he loves, or even that matters may not end that way in my own case; I simply say that love is enough. I decline to be worried with remote contingencies. I fall down and worship at the feet of this beautiful goddess; I bask in the sunshine of her smiles, and I am content. I don't know, and don't want to know, towards what rocks and shoals I may be drifting. I have not even the slightest clue as to the state of her feelings towards myself. I know that she likes me, but more than that I cannot say. Sometimes I get a look or a word which makes me tremble with hope; sometimes I am greeted with the most discouraging friendliness. I accept it all with such equanimity as I can muster; and am thankful that at least I am spared the pangs of jealousy; for my one rival (that Saint-Luc of whom I have already written to you) is scarcely formidable. I pity that poor devil. I don't like him, as I think I have said before, but I am genuinely sorry for him. He is a man with whom you would find yourself in complete sympathy, for his love is of that uncompromising kind which leaps direct to the Mairie and the altar, and will be satisfied with nothing less. Humility appears to be his idea of courtship. In Jeanne's presence he is silent, and rather awkward. He gazes at her with great eyes of despair, he agrees with every word that she utters, and he sends her bouquets three or four times a week. Bouquets! That of itself is sufficient to stamp the man, and to show how little he understands the lady whose affections he hopes to captivate. Cut flowers, if you like—though she has more roses in her own garden than she knows what to do with; but bouquets—stiff, accurate bouquets—arranged by means of wires and surrounded by a border of perforated paper—to *her*! But what can you expect of a man who says, “Mademoiselle, permit me to congratulate you upon your exquisite toilette!” or “Mademoiselle, allow me to offer you my compliments upon your charming coiffure!” and then imagines that he has made himself agreeable? I think she would hate him, but for her goodness and generosity. I can't believe that anything would ever induce her to become his wife, though all her friends and relations favour the match, and make no secret of their wishes.

‘It is not likely that you will see me at the Derby this year. I don't care a brass farthing what wins, and shall not take advantage of your tip about Macgregor. The life which I am now leading—and which entirely satisfies my soul—has interests

independent of horse-racing; and, indeed, of the world (in your sense of the word) altogether. I very seldom glance at a newspaper. I haven't the faintest idea of what is taking place in the Parliament of Great Britain; it is as much as I can do to get up a feeble excitement over the Emperor's *plébiscite*, which is making a great stir in this rather Radical community. You ask how I manage to kill time, and whether I have had any sport. Well, I have shot a wild boar and an eagle and an old Kabyle woman whom I peppered about the legs in mistake for a quail, and who raised no end of hullabaloo, refusing to be pacified at any less price than a hundred francs; but the fact is I don't care about going very far away from the town. I have always plenty to do; and whether it is the delicious climate, or whether it is the result of my mental condition, I can't say, but I am always in the best of health and spirits. I begin to whistle quite naturally as soon as I wake in the morning. I get up and have a bathe in the sea; then I come home to breakfast; then I paint a little; and then I pretty generally ride up to El Biar, where the De Mersacs live. There is often a dance somewhere in the evening. Failing that, I play a game or two of billiards with one or other of the young French officers quartered here—not half bad fellows, by the way—or else I climb up the narrow streets of the old town and get a peep at some weird Moorish ceremony or *fête*. I have no plans at present, and have no wish to form any. It is possible that I may be at home for Ascot, but it is not probable. I suppose the heat will drive me north eventually; but, as far as I can see, there will be no necessity for a move on that score for some time to come; and I don't see why I should pack up before I am obliged. The London season has no temptations for me. Indeed, setting aside all personal feeling in the matter, I am convinced that Algiers is an infinitely more agreeable place of residence in the month of May than London.'

Here we may take leave of Mr. Barrington's rather long-winded narrative. The impression produced by it upon the mind of its recipient was one which may very possibly be shared in by the reader. 'Just like Barrington!' he muttered, as he restored the bulky epistle to its envelope. 'For a man who goes in for philanthropy and that kind of thing, I must say he is about the most selfish beggar out. Making love is very good fun, as everybody knows; but, hang it all! if a man don't mean anything by it, it's deuced hard lines on the girl.'

Mademoiselle de Mersac would have been very much

astonished if this expression of opinion could have reached her ears. That her peace of mind was likely to become in any way endangered through the proximity of Mr. Barrington was a notion which certainly had not as yet suggested itself to her. She had liked him from the outset ; he belonged to a different species from that of the men who had hitherto come in her way ; she fancied, rightly or wrongly, that he was more honest and manly than they ; and, as she grew to know him better, her liking for him increased, till his visits became almost a necessary part of her daily life. She knew also, of course, that he admired her. But from admiration, or liking, to love is a long step, and Jeanne did not choose to think that Mr. Barrington had taken it—much less that she could have done so herself.

So, as the Duchess had a happy faculty of disbelieving in inconvenient potentialities ; as M. de Fontvieille found it wisest, as a general thing, to hold the same opinions as the Duchess ; as Léon was too much occupied with his own concerns to keep a watchful eye upon those of his sister ; and, as Saint-Luc had no power to speak a warning word, it came to pass that Barrington arrived at the Campagne de Mersac every day as regularly as the post, and that poor M. de Saint-Luc, who never ventured to present himself more than twice in the course of a week, invariably found his rival installed in the drawing-room when he was announced, and was not unfrequently made to feel that his entrance had interrupted a pleasant conversation.

In the first days of June, when the Hôtel d'Orient and the Hôtel de la Régence had bidden adieu to the last of their winter guests ; when the Governor-General had migrated from the town to his fairy-like palace on the leafy heights of Mustapha ; when the smaller fry of officials were, in imitation of him and in preparation for the hot season, transplanting themselves and their families to the coolest attainable villas ; when the aloes were in flower and the air was full of a hundred faint scents, and the corn and barley fields were very nearly ripe for the sickle—at the time of year, in short, when the luxuriant life and rich beauty of Algeria were at their climax—it occurred to Léon that it would be a good thing to make a journey into Kabylia. For in the grassy plains of that region, near the first spurs of the great Djurdjura range, dwelt one Señor Lopez, a Spanish colonist and a breeder of horses, who was generally open to a deal, and who, at this particular time, had a nice lot of foals on hand, out of some of which a discriminating young man might see his way to make honest profit. But as few people, be they

never so self-confident, like to rely upon their own judgment alone in so delicate a matter as the purchase of a foal, Léon conceived it to be a *sine quâ non* that his sister should accompany him. And then M. de Saint-Luc, hearing of the projected expedition, must needs declare that he could not possibly leave Algeria without revisiting the scene of his former campaigns, and that the opportunity of doing so in congenial society was one that he would not miss for any imaginable consideration. After which, oddly enough, Mr. Barrington, too, found out that to make acquaintance with the mountain scenery of Kabylia had always been one of his fondest dreams, and added—why not push on a little farther, and see some of the hill-villages and the famous Fort Napoléon?

Neither Léon nor Jeanne offered any objection to this plan; but when it was communicated to the Duchess, she held up her hands in horror and amazement.

‘And your chaperon, mademoiselle?’ she ejaculated. And the truth is that both the young folks had overlooked this necessary addition to their party.

Now, as the Duchess herself would no more have thought of undertaking a weary drive of three or four days’ duration over stony places than of ordering a fiery chariot to drive her straight to heaven, and as no other available lady of advanced years could be discovered, it seemed, for a time, as if either Mademoiselle de Mersac or her two admirers would have to remain in Algiers; but at the last moment a *deus ex machinâ* was found in the person of M. de Fontvieille, who announced his willingness to join the party, and who, as Léon politely remarked, when he was out of earshot, was, to all intents and purposes, as good as any old woman.

Poor old M. de Fontvieille! Nobody thanked him for what was an act of pure good-nature and self-sacrifice—nobody, at least, except Jeanne, who, by way of testifying her gratitude, spent a long morning with him, examining his collection of gems and listening to the oft-told tale of their several acquisitions, and, at the end, presented him with an exquisite Marshal Niel rosebud for his button-hole.

‘Ah, mademoiselle,’ said he, as he pinned the flower into his coat, ‘you do well to reserve your roses for old men, who appreciate such gifts at their right value. Give none to the young fellows; it would only increase their vanity, which is great enough already.’

‘I never give roses to anybody,’ said Jeanne.

‘So much the better. Continue, my child, to observe that wise rule. And remember that if the Lily of France is a stiffer flower than the Rose of England, it is still our own, and French women ought to love it best.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Jeanne, who objected to insinuations.

‘I mean nothing, my dear; lilies, I am aware, are out of fashion; choose violets if you prefer them,’ answered the old gentleman, with a chuckle.

And Jeanne, having no rejoinder ready, took up her sunshade in dignified silence, and went home.

In the garden she met Barrington and Léon, and to them she communicated her design for the journey in her usual brief, authoritative fashion. ‘We will take the light carriage,’ she said. ‘Pierre Cauvin can drive us; and M. de Fontvieille, Mr. Barrington, and I can occupy it. M. de Saint-Luc can ride with you, Léon.’

‘But I think Saint-Luc would like to drive part of the way,’ answered Léon.

‘Oh, no; why should he? He is sure to prefer riding.’

‘We can change about,’ said Barrington, magnanimously; and then the subject dropped.

But when the appointed day came, M. de Saint-Luc rode up to the door, with a very long face, and announced that it would be impossible for him to leave Algiers for the next forty-eight hours at least. ‘An old friend and brother-officer of mine arrived from Oran last night,’ he said. ‘He has made a *détour* on his way back to France on purpose to see me, and he would not like me to go away immediately.’

‘Of course you could not think of such a thing,’ Jeanne answered, decisively; ‘but you will be able to go into Kabylia some other time; it will not be at all too hot for another month at least.’

The Vicomte made a grimace. ‘If I do not go with you, Kabylia will have to make its arrangements for doing without me this year,’ he said. ‘I suppose—I suppose you could not postpone your departure for a day or two?’

‘Oh, no; I am afraid not. Léon has made an appointment with Señor Lopez.’

‘Then I can only trust to overtaking you before you have finished your tour. I shall start on horseback as soon as my friend leaves, and, as I suppose you will stay a day or two at Fort Napoléon, I may perhaps have the good fortune to find

you there—that is, if you do not object to my following you.’

‘Not in the least,’ replied Jeanne, not very cordially; ‘but it will be hardly worth while—will it?’

‘If you were going to the Cape of Good Hope, instead of to Fort Napoléon, I should think it worth while to follow you,’ said poor Saint-Luc.

Whereupon Jeanne turned impatiently away.

An hour later, she and Barrington were seated opposite to one another in the dilapidated waggonette which Léon used for country journeys. It was an ancient vehicle, with patched cushions and travel-stained leather roof and curtains; but its springs were strong, and it had outlived the jolts and shocks of many an unmetalled road and stony watercourse. Jeanne loved it for association’s sake; and Barrington, in his then state of mind, would not have changed it for the car of Aurora.

It is nine years or more since Mr. Barrington was borne swiftly along the dusty road which leads eastward from Algiers in that shabby old shandrydan—and in nine years, the doctors tell us, our whole outer man has been renewed, so that the being which calls itself I to-day inhabits a changed prison from that which it dwelt in a hundred and eight months ago, and will, if it survive, occupy a hundred and eight months hence. Mental statistics are less easy to arrive at, and it may be that our minds are not as subject to the inexorable law of change as our bodies. Barrington, at all events, whose views upon more subjects than one have unquestionably become modified by the lapse of nine years, still asserts, in confidential moments, that he looks back upon that drive into Kabylia as the happiest episode in his existence. ‘Life,’ he says, in that melancholy tone which perfectly prosperous men have a trick of assuming, ‘is a dull enough business, take it all in all; but it has its good days here and there.’ And then he sighs, and puffs silently at his cigar for a minute or two. ‘Old de Fontvieille sat on the box,’ he goes on presently, ‘and talked to the driver. Young De Mersac had ridden ahead, and she and I were as completely alone together as if we had been upon a desert island. It was a situation in which human nature instinctively shakes itself free of commonplace conventionality. We did not flirt—thank Heaven, we were neither of us so *vulgar* as to think of flirting!—but we talked together as freely and naturally as Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.’ And then he generally heaves

another sigh, and rhapsodises on and on till, patient as one is, one has to remind him that it is long past bedtime.

As (to use a hackneyed illustration) the traveller looks back upon distant purple mountains, forgetting, as he contemplates their soft beauty, the roughness of the track by which he crossed them, so Barrington recalls the happy bygone days of his Kabylia journey, and ignores the petty annoyances which somewhat marred his enjoyment of it while it lasted. To hear him talk, you would think that the sun had never been too hot, nor the roads too dusty, during that memorable excursion; that good food was obtainable at every halting-place, and that he had never had cause to complain of the accommodation provided for him for the night. Time has blotted out from his mental vision all retrospect of dirt, bad food, and the virulent attacks of the African flea—a most malignant insect—*impiger*, *iracundus*, *inexorabilis*, *acer*—an animal who dies as hard as a rhinoceros, and is scarcely less venomous than a mosquito. He dwells not now upon the horrors of his first night at Bon-Douaou, during which he sat up in bed, through long wakeful hours, doggedly scattering insecticide among his savage assailants, and producing about as much effect thereby as a man slinging stones at an ironclad might do. The place where there was nothing but briny bacon to eat, the place where there was nothing but a broken-down billiard-table and a rug to sleep upon, and the place where there was nothing to drink, except bad absinthe—all these have faded out of his recollection. But, in truth, these small discomforts were soon forgotten, even at the time.

For when the baking plain was left behind, and the travellers stood upon the windy summit of the Col Ben-Aïcha, with Great Kabylia beneath their feet, and the tumbled mass of the Djurdjura mountains, towering, snow-crowned, against a cloudless sky, before them, even M. de Fontvieille—no great enthusiast in respect of scenery—was fain to confess that so magnificent a prospect and such a strong, bracing air were well worth the inconvenience it had cost him to obtain them; while Barrington broke forth into the most exaggerated expressions of eulogy, gladdening thereby the heart of Jeanne, who felt something of the pride of ownership in the beauty of her beloved Algeria.

When Thomas of Ercildoune took his famous ride with the Queen of the Fairies, and reached a region unknown to man, it will be remembered that the fair lady drew rein for a few minutes and indicated to her companion the various paths that

lay before them. There was the thorny way of righteousness and the broad road of iniquity—neither of which have ever been found entirely free from drawbacks by mortals—but besides these, there was a third path.

O see ye not that bonny road,
That winds about the fernie brae?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where thou and I this night maun gae.

And Thomas seems to have offered no objection to his leader's choice.

Even so Barrington, though capable of distinguishing between broad and narrow paths, and their respective goals; capable also—which is perhaps more to the purpose—of forecasting the results of prudence and folly, chose at this time to close his eyes, and wander, with Jeanne, into that fairy-land of which every man gets a glimpse in his time, though few have the good fortune to linger within its precincts as long as did Thomas the Rhymer.

And so there came to him five days of which he will probably never see the like again. Five days of glowing sunshine; five luminous, starlit nights—eighty hours, more or less (making deductions for sleeping time) of unreasoning, unthinking, unmixed happiness—such was Barrington's share of Fairyland—and a very fair share too as the world goes. He would be puzzled now—and indeed, for that matter, he would have been puzzled a week after the excursion—to give any accurate description of the country between Algiers and Fort Napoléon. The sum of his reminiscences was that, in the dewy mornings and the cool evenings, he drove through a wooded, hilly country with Jeanne; that he rested in the noonday heat at spacious whitewashed caravanserais or small wayside taverns, and talked to Jeanne; that her tall, graceful figure was the first sight he saw in the morning and the last at night; that he never left her side for more than ten minutes at a time; that he discovered some fresh charm in her with each succeeding hour; and that when he arrived at Fort Napoléon, and the limit of his wanderings, he was as completely and irretrievably in love as ever man was.

In truth, the incidents of the journey were well calculated to enhance the mixture of admiration and reverence with which Barrington had regarded Mademoiselle de Mersac from the moment of his first meeting with her. Her progress through

Kabyl'a was like that of a gracious queen among her subjects. The swarthy Kabyle women, to whom she spoke in their own language, and for the benefit of whose ragged children she had provided herself with a multitude of toys, broke into shrill cries of welcome when they recognised her; the sparse French colonists, at whose farms she stopped, came out to greet her with smiles upon their careworn faces; at the caravanseraï of the Issers, where some hundreds of Arabs were assembled for the weekly market, the Caïd of the tribe, a stately grey-bearded patriarch, who wore the star of the Legion of Honour upon his white burnous, stepped out from his tent, as she approached, and, bowing profoundly, took her hand and raised it to his forehead; even the villainous, low-browed, thin-lipped Spanish countenance of Señor Lopez assumed an expression of deprecating amiability when she addressed him; he faltered in the tremendous lies which, from mere force of habit, he felt constrained to utter about the pedigree of his colts; his sly little beady eyes dropped before her great grave ones, he listened silently while she pointed out the inconsistencies of his statements, and finally made a far worse bargain with M. Léon than he had expected or intended to do.

And if anything more had been needed to complete Barrington's subjugation, the want would have been supplied by Jeanne's demeanour towards himself. Up to the time of this memorable journey she had treated him with a perceptible measure of caprice, being kind or cold as the humour took her—sometimes receiving him as an old friend, sometimes as a complete stranger, and even snubbing him without mercy, upon one or two occasions. It was her way to behave so towards all men, and she had not seen fit to exempt Mr. Barrington altogether from the common lot of his fellows. But now—perhaps because she had escaped from the petty trammels and irritations of everyday life, perhaps because the free air of the mountains which she loved disposed her to cast aside formality, or perhaps from causes unacknowledged by herself—her intercourse with the Englishman assumed a wholly new character. She wandered willingly with him into those quaint Kabyle villages which stand each perched upon the apex of a conical hill—villages which took a deal of fighting to capture, and might have to be taken all over again, so Léon predicted, one fine day; she stood behind him and looked over his shoulder while he dashed off hasty likenesses of such of the natives as he could induce, by means of bribes, to overcome

their strong natural aversion to having their portraits taken ; she never seemed to weary of his company ; and if there was still an occasional touch of condescension in her manner, it is probable that Barrington, feeling as he then did, held such manifestations to be only fitting and natural as coming from her to him.

And then, by degrees, there sprang up between them a kind of natural understanding, an intuitive perception of each other's thoughts and wishes, and a habit of covertly alluding to small matters and small jokes unknown to either of their companions. And sometimes their eyes met for a second, and often an unintelligible smile appeared upon the lips of the one to be instantaneously reflected upon those of the other. All of which things were perceived by the observant M. de Fontvieille, and caused him to remark aloud every night, in the solitude of his own chamber, before going to bed : ' Madame, I was not the instigator of this expedition ; on the contrary, I warned you against it. I had no power and no authority to prevent its consequences, and I wash my hands of them.'

The truth is, that the poor old gentleman was looking forward with some trepidation to an interview with the Duchess which his prophetic soul saw looming in the future.

Fort Napoléon, frowning down from its rocky eminence upon subjugated Kabylia, is the most important fortress of that once turbulent country, and is rather a military post than a town or village. It has, however, a modicum of civilian inhabitants, dwelling in neat little white houses on either side of a broad street, and at the eastern end of the street a small church has been erected. Thither Jeanne betook herself, one evening, at the hour of the Ave Maria, as her custom was. The sun was sinking in the glow of a cloudless sky ; the breeze, which had rioted all day among the heights, had died away into a dead calm, and the universal rest and silence was broken only by the ting-ting of the little church-bell—

Che paia il giorno pianger che si muore.

Jeanne passed in to her devotions, and the heretic Englishman lounged at the door and listened to the slumberous droning of the priest within. After a time the voice ceased, and then the worshippers—two or three old crones and a couple of black-robed Sisters of Charity—trooped out, and passed away down the sunny street. Then there was unbroken stillness for five minutes ; and then the door swung back on its hinges, and

Jeanne emerged from the gloom of the church and met the dazzling blaze of the sunset, which streamed full upon her, making her cast her eyes upon the ground.

She paused for a moment upon the threshold, and as she stood there, with her pale face, her drooped eyelids, and a sweet, grave smile upon her lips, Barrington, whose imagination was for ever playing him tricks, mentally likened her to one of Fra Angelico's angels. She did not in reality resemble one of those ethereal beings much more than she did the heathen goddess to whom he had once before compared her; but something of the sanctity of the church seemed to cling about her, and that, together with the tranquillity of the hour, kept Barrington silent for a few minutes after they had walked away side by side. It was not until they had reached the western ramparts, and, leaning over them, were gazing down into purple valleys lying in deep shade beneath the glowing hill-tops, that he opened his lips.

So we really go back again to-morrow,' he sighed.

'Yes, to-morrow,' she answered, absently.

'Back to civilisation—back to the dull, monotonous world! What a bore it all is! I wish I could stay here for ever!'

'What? You would like to spend the rest of your life at Fort Napoléon?' said Jeanne, with a smile. 'How long would it take you to tire of Kabylia? A week—two weeks? Not perhaps so much.'

'Of what does not one tire in time?' he answered. 'I have tried most things, and have found them all tolerably wearisome in the end. But there is one thing of which I could never tire.'

'And that?'—inquired Jeanne, facing him with raised eyebrows of calm interrogation.

He had been going to say 'Your society,' but somehow he felt ashamed to utter so feeble a commonplace, and substituted for it, rather tamely, 'My friends.'

'Ah! there are many people who tire of them also, after a time,' remarked Jeanne. 'As for me, I have so few friends,' she added, a little sadly.

'I hope you will always think of me as one of those few,' said Barrington.

'You? Oh, yes, if you wish it,' she answered, rather hurriedly. Then, as if desiring to change the subject, 'How quiet everything is!' she exclaimed. 'Quite in the distance I can hear that there is somebody riding up the hill from Tizi-Ouzou; listen!'

Barrington bent his ear forward, and managed just to distinguish the faint ringing of a horse's hoofs upon the road far below. Presently even this scarcely perceptible sound died away, and a universal hush brooded over the earth and air. Then, for a long time, neither of them spoke again—Jeanne because her thoughts were wandering; Barrington because he was half afraid of what he might say if he trusted himself to open his lips.

The sun dipped behind the mountain ridge; a little breeze rose, shivered, and fell, and then the galloping of a horse smote once more loud and clear upon the ears of the listeners. Nearer and nearer it sounded, till at last horse and rider shot out from behind a shoulder of rock directly beneath them; showed, for a moment, huge and black, against the ruddy sky; and then, clattering under the arched gateway of the town, disappeared.

‘It is M. de Saint-Luc!’ ejaculated Jeanne, in a tone of some dismay.

And Barrington, beneath his breath, muttered ‘Hang him!’ with most heartfelt emphasis.

CHAPTER X.

IN WHICH MR. BARRINGTON LOSES HIS TEMPER.

Love, which set Trojans and Greeks by the ears of old, involving pious Æneas and many-counselled Ulysses in a peck of troubles—which led Roman Antony to his death—which was nearly becoming the ruin of David, King of Israel—and which, in all ages, has been the cause of many a wise man's doing many a foolish thing—love it was that had led Saint-Luc—a person noted for his tact and good sense—into the stupid blunder of thrusting himself into the company of four people who were perfectly happy together without him.

The very thought, indeed, which in his normal state of mind would have kept him from tacking himself on to the party—namely, a strong suspicion that he was not wanted—had now exercised a directly opposite influence upon him. A perpetual vision of Jeanne and Mr. Barrington wandering together in wild Kabylian solitudes had so beset him by day, and driven

sleep from his pillow by night, ever since he had found himself alone in Algiers, that at last he could bear it no longer, and feeling that reality could have no pangs in store for him more bitter than those of imagination, he packed what clothes he required into a small valise, strapped it on to the front of his saddle, and galloped off on the track of the wanderers. And so, having done the distance in a much shorter time than a prudent man would have allowed, he reached Fort Napoléon at length, and earned a chill welcome for himself and a pair of puffy forelegs for his horse.

M. de Fontvieille, who happened to be standing at the door of the little inn, enjoying the evening air, pulled a wry face when he recognised the impetuous horseman who drew rein beside him.

‘What—is it you, M. le Vicomte?’ he cried, in anything but a joyous tone.

Saint-Luc did not seem to notice any want of cordiality in his reception. He swung himself out of the saddle, and held out his hand, exclaiming—

‘What good fortune that I find you still here!’

‘How, good fortune? I don’t understand you,’ returned the old gentleman rather testily. ‘Of course we are here. Where else should we be?’

‘I feared you might have altered your route and gone to Dellys, or somewhere else,’ answered Saint-Luc, rather abashed. ‘I thought,’ he continued apologetically, ‘that as I was unable to start with you, I might venture to follow as soon as I found myself free; so I set out from Algiers yesterday morning—and here I am.’

‘So I perceive,’ grunted M. de Fontvieille, not at all mollified; ‘and charmed as I am to see you, monsieur, I can only regret that you should have put yourself to so much inconvenience, for I fear you will have had your ride for your pains. We start on our return journey early to-morrow morning, Heaven be praised! I confess that years have deprived me of all taste for rough travelling.’

‘To-morrow morning!’ echoed Saint-Luc, rather blankly. ‘H’m!—nothing can be more certain than that my horse will not be in a state to leave the stable for another four-and-twenty hours at least. But I can easily get him sent back from here in a day or two,’ he added, brightening. ‘Perhaps you would kindly allow me to take a seat in your carriage. Or would that incommode you too much?’

Poor M. de Fontvieille was not in the best of tempers. As he had said, he was no longer of an age to enjoy roughing it, and any pleasure he might have derived from the contemplation of fine scenery had been completely neutralised of late by the discovery of the growing intimacy between Jeanne and the Englishman. Moreover, he had been kept waiting more than half an hour for his dinner, and the inopportune appearance of Saint-Luc was, at this especial moment, almost too much for him. 'The carriage does not belong to me,' he replied crossly; 'but I dare say Léon will have no objection to your taking a place in it; it is made to hold six people at a pinch, I believe. For myself, I have hitherto sat on the box, and I intend to do so for the remainder of the trip. I do not like the box-seat; it is exposed to the sun and the dust, and I am compelled to lean back upon an iron rail which eats into my spine; but I prefer that to making one of three inside. It is you who will occupy that enviable position to-morrow, monsieur.'

This was not very pleasant. Saint-Luc began to wish that he had remained in Algiers. But while he was doubting what reply to make, a friendly slap on his shoulder made him turn round with a start, and he found himself face to face with Léon.

'So you have come at last!' cried that innocent young man. 'We had quite given up all hope of you. Why did you not start sooner?'

'I could not get away,' the poor Vicomte answered ruefully; 'and now I am not sure whether I shall do well to return with you. M. de Fontvieille has just been telling me that I shall be *de trop* in the carriage; and I cannot take my horse out to-morrow.'

'*De trop?*—nonsense—how can you be *de trop*? M. de Fontvieille was joking,' said Léon rather confusedly; for he understood what the old gentleman had meant, and wondered how he could have been so foolish as to stir up unnecessary jealousies. He (Léon) would never have committed such a *gavacherie*. By way of repairing the mischief, and making things comfortable, he went on to say that, so far from making an unwelcome addition to the party, Saint-Luc's arrival would be an immense comfort to them all—'especially to Jeanne, who must be getting tired of Mr. Barrington by this time, charming as he is. I have had business in one place and another, which has forced me to perform nearly the whole journey in solitude; and so, of course, the duty of entertaining the stranger has fallen

upon Jeanne, though in reality he is rather my friend than hers. It will be a pleasant change for her to have some one else to talk to during the long drive home.'

'You think so?' said Saint-Luc with a faint smile. 'But that, after all, is hardly the question. M. de Fontvieille only pointed out to me that three is an awkward number—and I quite agree with him.'

'Pierre might ride my horse, and then we could all go in the carriage together,' suggested the accommodating Léon. And then Barrington and Jeanne came in sight, strolling up the street in the twilight as leisurely as if three hungry men were not waiting dinner for them.

Barrington, distinguishing the little silent group at the inn-door, guessed at once that they had been talking about him. M. de Fontvieille fidgeted in his cane chair, and glanced sharply from him to Jeanne and from Jeanne back to him again. Léon looked embarrassed, and Saint-Luc, leaning against the door-post with folded arms and eyes gloomily riveted upon the ground, remained immovable as a statue. And now, for the first time, Barrington realised with a transient jealous twinge what a singularly handsome man his rival was. An oval face, an olive complexion, a heavy black moustache, a small head well set on to a pair of broad shoulders, a tall, lithe, muscular frame—what more could anyone desire in the shape of manly beauty? Saint-Luc wore a sun-helmet, tightly fitting cords, and high riding-boots, and, flung back from his shoulders, was the short *caban* or white hooded cloak which is worn by officers in Algeria when on up-country duty, and is also in much favour among such civilians as have an eye for effect. It is of no earthly use, but it is unquestionably a picturesque and becoming garment. Barrington was neither tall nor specially good-looking. He wore, on the present occasion, a tweed suit, not in its first freshness, a wide-awake hat, and a puggaree soiled with a week's dust. 'Why didn't I get one of those confounded sun-helmets?' he thought; and then inwardly laughed a little at his own vanity. Was Jeanne the woman to draw comparisons between sun-helmets and wide-awakes?

A few minutes later the whole party were seated at a round table in the low-roofed *salle-à-manger*, discussing what by courtesy was called their dinner by the light of an evil-smelling paraffin lamp. They had not noticed the offensiveness of the oil before, but they all remarked upon it now; they discovered, too, that the food was bad, and the wine execrable, and the

tablecloth dirty. Conversation flagged somewhat, nor did anyone venture upon a foolish little joke, such as had been wont of late to crop up about this hour. Jeanne was cold, stately, and reserved—the Jeanne of the Campagne de Mersac in her least expansive moments—a very different person from the girl who had driven with Barrington over the Col Ben-Aïcha and the lowlands of the Issers. And so one, at least, of the company was there and then summarily ejected from Fairyland, and falling roughly upon hard, practical earth, lost his temper a little in the process. That is the worst of aerial castle-building: one touch from a clumsy, unconscious, not malevolent hand, and away goes the whole flimsy fabric, leaving no trace behind it. The poor stupid paw that has swept it into space has only forestalled time a little, and ought not, perhaps, to be blamed, but it can hardly expect to escape some momentary hatred. Barrington, for whom all rough places had been carefully made smooth from his childhood up, resented a stroke of bad luck like a personal affront, and was always angry with anyone who hurt him, whether intentionally or not. He was very angry now with Saint-Luc, which was perhaps pardonable; he was angry also with Léon and M. de Fontvieille, which was hardly fair; and lastly, he was angry with Jeanne for not devoting her whole attention to him, which was most unjust. At his time of life he ought to have known better than to show his annoyance; but he did not. He sulked openly, returned curt answers when he was addressed, contradicted Saint-Luc half-a-dozen times in an entirely uncalled-for manner, and generally did his best to render an uncomfortable situation worse than it need have been.

Everybody was thankful when the dreary meal was at an end; and the old commandant of the place happening to drop in at that moment, and challenging M. de Fontvieille to a game of dominoes, Jeanne gladly seized the opportunity to propose to the others that they should go outside into the cool evening air. 'It is impossible to breathe in this atmosphere,' she said; 'I am stifling.'

So they all passed from the glare and heat of the room, through the doorway, where the landlord and a few of his friends were chatting over their cigarettes, and out into the solemn starlight; Jeanne first, then Saint-Luc, then Léon, Barrington bringing up the rear.

The latter was still at loggerheads with the world. He wanted to walk with Jeanne, but he did not choose to make

the first advance, and loitered behind, thinking that she would perhaps make some sign to him to join her. As a matter of course she did no such thing. She gave him his chance by standing for a minute before the inn to wrap the light burnous which she had brought out with her about her shoulders; but as he did not take advantage of it, she marched away up the street at a steady pace without casting a glance behind her, and Saint-Luc strode by her side. Barrington made no effort to follow them. He lighted a cigar with much deliberation, stuck his hands into his pockets, and strolled across the road to a bench, upon which he seated himself. Léon, after a moment of hesitation, followed his example, remarking blandly as he did so: 'It is a charming night for a walk.'

'So your sister and M. de Saint-Luc appear to think. I can't understand how people can enjoy posting off at the rate of five miles an hour directly they have swallowed their dinner,' remarked Barrington.

'Why, you have walked after dinner every night yourself till this evening,' cried Léon innocently.

Barrington made no reply. He was gazing after two figures which were rapidly diminishing into the gloom. The vanished for a second under the deep shadow of some acacia trees; then they emerged, and he caught a glimpse of the shimmer of Jeanne's burnous and Saint-Luc's short white cloak fluttering in the night breeze; then the intervening angle of a house shut them out again, and they were gone.

Barrington sighed, and puffed silently at his cigar. After all, he was only playing at being jealous; he was not really afraid of the handsome Vicomte; he was only chagrined that his happy dream should have been so rudely dispelled; and, moreover, if he had analysed his feelings, he would have found that no small part of his annoyance was due to the first stirring in his mind of that disquieting question which must, sooner or later, arise out of love-making—how is it to end? He had dodged out of the way of this pertinacious little note of interrogation; he had tried to stifle it, and pretended to ignore it, but, spite of all he could do, there it was; and now what could be expected but that it should grow larger and larger and daily more obtrusive till it got a plain answer out of its victim? As yet, however, Barrington had not begun to disturb himself with reference to the future, and was conscious only of a vague uneasiness, together with a strong present desire to arise up and follow Jeanne and Saint-Luc into the darkness. But as

such a proceeding would involve loss of dignity, he decided to resist his inclinations and remain where he was. 'She will come back presently,' he thought, 'and then I can apologise for having been surly at dinner. I believe I did make myself rather unpleasant, now I come to think of it.'

Ten minutes passed slowly away, while Léon discoursed about the conquest of Kabylia and wasted some interesting anecdotes upon a pre-occupied hearer; but Jeanne did not return. There was a stir and a scraping of chairs in the inn over the way; M. le Commandant, wrapped in his military cloak, stepped out into the street and strode away with ringing spurs; a light appeared in M. de Fontvieille's bedroom and ere long was extinguished. That unworthy chaperon had gone to bed, leaving his charge to roam about with young men under the stars. The church-clock struck the half-hour, and Barrington began to fidget. Léon had got out of the regions of history now, and was discussing the respective merits of military and civil government in Algeria—'*Cercles militaires*'—'*Bureaux Arabes*'—'two hundred thousand Europeans against two millions and a half of *indigènes*'—'the necessity of keeping an active force always before the eyes of half-civilised races.' Disjointed fragments of Léon's harangue fell meaninglessly upon Barrington's inattentive ears, and he threw in a 'Yes' or a 'No,' or an 'Exactly so,' as occasion appeared to require.

'Your sister is taking a very long walk,' he said at length, anxiety getting the better of self-respect.

'Not longer than usual, is she? it is so warm and fine to-night. Well, you see these vile Republicans—a set of beggarly ruffians whose only policy is to uproot every existing institution, in order that they may have a chance of picking up something when there is a scramble for fresh places—are agitating for a civil government. They complain of this and that, and point to abuses here and there; and abuses there are, sure enough, but what would you have? Are civilians likely to be honest men than soldiers? For my part, I believe that officials of all classes will invariably fill their pockets out of the public exchequer, whenever they see an opportunity of doing so without being found in the act. No, no; what we want is security—security for our lives, security for our property.'

Quite right, I'm sure. Security, as you say, is the essential thing, and without security, you know—why, where are you, you know? Your sister and M. de Saint-Luc have been

away exactly three-quarters of an hour. Is it possible that they can have lost their way ?'

'Quite impossible. The gates of the town are shut, and they cannot be very far away from us at this moment. What I maintain is that the Arab will never understand nor fear a ruler in a black coat. The Governor-General ought always to be a man who is ready to enforce obedience at the head of an army, if need be, and those who imagine that there will be no more fighting in Algeria are very much mistaken. This idea of a Civil Governor is only the first step in a policy which must end in disaster. The same men who clamour for a reformed system of rule, declare that we have many more regiments in the country than are necessary for our protection. If they carry out their programme, the Algerian forces will be gradually reduced till, some fine morning, we shall wake to find that the Arabs have risen and the whole colony is in a blaze. We poor farmers shall lose our property ; hundreds of unfortunate Europeans will be massacred, and—oh, here is Jeanne.'

'When is the massacre to take place, Léon ?' asked that young lady, appearing suddenly out of the gloom, followed by M. de Saint-Luc. 'More people die of fever than of massacre in this country, Mr. Barrington, and the very best way to catch a fever is to sit out at night when the dews are falling. For Léon it does not matter, he is acclimatised ; but he ought to have made you walk about.'

'I meant to have walked, but I was waiting for you. I could not tell that you would be such a very long time away,' said Barrington, in a slightly aggrieved tone.

'I am sorry that you should have been kept waiting,' she answered, rather coldly ; 'and now it is too late to think of anything but bed. I am so tired that I think I will bid you all good-night at once.'

She turned as she spoke, and, crossing the road, vanished into the inn, and Barrington, being out of temper with the world generally and M. de Saint-Luc particularly, threw away the end of his cigar and announced that he was going to bed too.

'We will all go to bed ; we shall have to start early to-morrow morning,' said Léon ; but Saint-Luc laid his hand upon the young man's arm, saying, 'Wait for another quarter of an hour ; I want to have a chat with you'—so Barrington entered the house alone.

Saint-Luc linked his arm within that of his young friend,

led him back to the bench which the Englishman had just vacated, and, throwing himself down upon it, sighed out : ' Well, it is all over ! She will have nothing to say to me.'

Léon could not pretend to misunderstand his meaning. He was sincerely sorry to hear such bad news, for he liked Saint-Luc, and would gladly have welcomed him as a brother-in-law, and, moreover, the Duchess and M. de Fontvieille had taken a great deal of trouble lately to convince him of the desirability of his sister's speedy marriage. At the same time experience had taught him that Jeanne always knew her own mind, and that when she said no, she meant no ; and this knowledge made it difficult for him to find any consolatory reply for the benefit of the luckless wooer. At length, however, he asked— ' Are you quite sure of that ?' which was perhaps the best thing he could have said under the circumstances.

' It is not her fault if I am not,' returned Saint-Luc, with a dreary laugh. ' She told me she could no more marry me than M. de Fontvieille.'

' That,' said Léon, feeling very uncomfortable, and wishing most heartily that his friend could have chosen some other confidant—' that is, of course, only a way of speaking. Jeanne often expresses herself strongly ; but she does not always mean quite all that she says, and I am sure that she did not intend to be unkind or rude to you.'

' She was neither the one nor the other ; on the contrary, she was most kind. I think she has not quite understood me till now. She thought I was seeking a *mariage de convenance*, whereas—but it does not much signify. No one could have been more gentle and compassionate than she was, but that does not alter the fact that she has broken my heart. Do not laugh, Léon. A year ago I no more believed in broken hearts than you do ; but when a man suffers such pain as I suffer, he must cease to be a sceptic, whether he will or no. I know what you would say—" *On ne meurt pas de cette maladie-là*"—but that is just what makes it a more infernal torture than any physical one. *Tenez !* if it were not that I dread causing annoyance to others, I would put a pistol to my head this very night. Bon Dieu ! what is this wretched thing called life that a man should care to keep it in his body ? What has my life been ? The life of a dog—what do I say—of a lap-dog—a useless, dull, over-fed brute. Looking back upon past years, I cannot recall a single day or a single hour that I would choose to live over again : it is all idleness, and satiety, and disgust. I don't know

how far I have been to blame; there must be some atom of good in me, or I should not so abhor myself; but I suppose it has not had force to struggle against the bad side of my nature. Before I met your sister I looked forward to dawdling through the rest of my life in a resigned, discontented sort of way. I knew I should never be of the smallest good to myself or anybody else in the world, and I did not much care; but then I saw her, and fell in love with her (God knows why or wherefore—we wretched humans have no control over our fate), and that changed everything. I thought I might possibly become—I won't say worthy of her—but as worthy as a man with my past could be. I had dreams and projects, all of which have been blown into space by one word, so that I need not trouble you with them. Ah, why did I ever see her? Why was I not left in my brutish indifference, if I was to spend all the rest of my life in hopelessness and solitude? If I believed in the Christian religion—which I do not, unfortunately; the world that I have lived in has honestly rejected that faith, finding it impossible to make it fit in with its own system of morality—I say, if I were a Christian, I would turn Trappist. It is a kind of suicide which the Church, knowing that some loophole out of the world must be left open for desperate men, permits, and is even kind enough to reward with a palm and a crown, instead of with hell-fire. But that door is closed to me. I have no faith in the palm or the crown, and should not know what to do with them when I had got them. There remains the pistol. I shall not use it just yet, for reasons that you may surmise; but before many months are over, I hope to rid society of one of its most useless members.'

So poor Saint-Luc raved on, pacing to and fro in the dust and throwing his arms about as Frenchmen will do when they are in despair, or fancy themselves so. We English are a less demonstrative race; still one has heard a deal of nonsense talked by one's own compatriots under similar circumstances. The difficulty is to know what to say by way of comfort to a man who has just been refused. To tell him that he will get over it in time may be true, but savours of brutality, while encouragement to make another attempt may only lead him on to a second repulse. Practically, however, I believe that everybody does adopt the latter alternative. Léon, at all events, did so upon the present occasion.

'I think you would be wrong to take Jeanne's decision as final,' he said, as soon as he could get a hearing. 'You have

been a little abrupt with her, and then, too, it seems to me that you have not chosen a very appropriate occasion.'

'Do you seriously mean to tell me,' broke in Saint-Luc, 'that it would have made the slightest difference if I had spoken last week, or had put off doing so till next? Bah! I found myself alone with her—a thing which does not happen to me every day, let me remind you—I was tired of suspense, and I said to myself that I would know the worst—*Voilà!*'

'That is just it. You made up your mind that you would know the worst, and you let her see that you expected the worst, and therefore you failed. All women are the same; throw yourself at their feet and they will tramp'e upon you; face them boldly, and they will yield,' said Léon, whose youthful assumption of knowledge of a subject which the wisest of men have failed to fathom will perhaps be pardoned by those who remember that he was really sorry for his friend, and was doing what in him lay to console the afflicted one. 'I grant you that Jeanne is not like other girls,' continued this successful student of character; her education and position are different from those of other girls—else you could hardly have spoken to her as you have done this evening—but for all that, she is a woman, and women require humouring. The fact is that you have addressed yourself to her at the wrong moment.'

'The wrong moment!' interrupted Saint-Luc—'why the wrong moment? Because that Englishman is here? Is there ever a moment when he is not with her? My good Léon, I am as much in love as it is possible to be, but I am not therefore blind. It is sufficiently evident to me that your sister will marry the Englishman, against whom I have nothing to say. If he be not more worthy of her than I, he must be a far worse man than I take him for. Whether he loves her as devotedly as I do, is another question.'

'Jeanne marry Mr. Barrington? Absurd!' cried Léon. 'Neither M. de Fontvieille, nor the Duchess, nor I, would ever consent to her becoming the wife of a foreigner and a Protestant.'

'But I thought she was free to marry whom she pleased?'

'Well, yes, so she is, in a certain sense; but of course she would never think of disregarding the wishes of—of all her friends. Besides, she would never have been so friendly with Mr. Barrington if she had had an idea of such an end to this intimacy. No, no, my friend; believe me, there is nothing of that kind. Try again in a month's time; be less diffident, and

you will very likely be successful. I think Jeanne knows that all our sympathies are with you.'

'Will you speak to her on the subject?' asked Saint-Luc, who was only too willing to be persuaded into hope, against his own judgment.

'Why, no,' answered Léon, hesitatingly; 'I don't think I could quite do that; she would not like it. You see, she is a little older than I am, and she has always been accustomed to take the lead, and she is not precisely one of those people whom one can interfere with easily, and—and—in point of fact, I really doubt whether my speaking would not do more harm than good. If I am to be quite candid with you, I must confess that neither I nor anybody else has much authority over Jeanne; but she is so good and so self-sacrificing that she would do a great deal to please any one of us, and——'

'I don't wish her to sacrifice herself,' interrupted Saint-Luc.

'I express myself badly. What I meant to say was that our wishes would have a good deal of weight with her. As I told you just now, I believe she knows what our wishes are, and we will try to make them more apparent. I don't see that we can do anything more for you.'

'I suppose not,' sighed Saint-Luc. 'I will try again then; it is a forlorn hope, but it is better than nothing. Thank you for your sympathy. Now you are dying to get to sleep, and I will not keep you up any longer. Good-night.'

So Léon went to his bed, and Saint-Luc roamed about the silent town till daylight, mentally balancing himself against Barrington, and deriving no encouragement from the process.

It is perhaps needless to add that he did not occupy the vacant seat in the waggonette on the following day.

CHAPTER XI.

IN WHICH MR. BARRINGTON WINS A GAME OF BILLIARDS.

ONE of the most grievous burdens attaching to royal birth must be, one would think, the impossibility of getting from one country to another without well-meant but tedious demonstrations of loyalty and respect. An unfortunate emperor, king, or prince lands from the steamer in which, perhaps, he has been

wofully sea-sick, or steps out of his special train, dirty and weary, and there, upon the platform, stands his worship the mayor, in furred gown and gold chain, with an attendant body of aldermen and town-councillors, and proceeds to entertain the illustrious traveller with a loyal and long-winded address of welcome. The poor royal personage knows perfectly well the stereotyped, meaningless phrases which are about to be hurled at him, and knows also the terms in which it will be expected he should reply thereto. The whole business must be to him a monstrous unnecessary bore ; still, it has to be gone through, and he goes through it as cheerfully as may be. If, however, he be a shifty royal personage, and can manage to get his luggage moved with extra rapidity, there is a reasonable mode of escape open to him. It may be announced that his Majesty, or his Royal Highness, as the case may be, is compelled to proceed on his journey with all possible despatch, and must deny himself the pleasure of hearing or delivering speeches on his way ; the loyal address, therefore, will be ‘taken as read.’ So the illuminated parchment is hastily shoved in at the carriage window, the exalted creature inside advances, bows and smiles with such affability as nature has granted to him, and is presently whisked away in a manner satisfactory, it is to be hoped, both to himself and others.

If only certain days of our life, the net result of which can be easily foretold—days of mere barren vexation and weariness of the flesh—could be thus summarily dismissed, and taken as lived, how thankful some of us would be ? In real life, unfortunately, there is no stealing a march upon Time : we must take the rough with the smooth, and all we have to consider is how to swallow measureless tedium with a minimum of yawns ; but when it comes to be a question of fiction, to which, it may be presumed, nobody resorts unless with some faint expectation of amusement, nature revolts against dulness, and nimbly skips over the prosy passages. Those prosy passages need never be written at all, and much labour might be spared to writer as well as reader could the former but guess when he is about to become wearisome ; but that, no doubt, is past hoping for. Of one thing, however, every narrator may be sure—that when, in the course of his story, he feels disposed to dwell upon any particular subject, he is getting upon dangerous ground, and had best quit that subject without further delay. The present writer, being conscious of an inclination to linger among the sunny valleys and breezy heights of Kabylia, now, therefore, resolutely turns away from that pleasant land, and shutting out

his background of mountains and blue sky, narrows the limits of his stage to the four walls of a heated and not over well-lighted billiard-room.

It is a long, low-roofed room, occupying the whole entresol above one of the principal cafés of Algiers, and containing several tables. At one of these Barrington and a friend, picked up at the Hotel d'Orient, are hard at work in their shirt-sleeves, endeavouring, not very successfully, to master the science of the cannon game, while at a more distant one, M. de Saint-Luc, with pale face and downcast mien, is absently knocking the balls about, pausing every now and again to emit a half-smothered sigh. Léon, outstretched upon a sofa, with a cigarette in his mouth and a tall glass of vermouth and water on a table at his side, contemplates with the serene smile of a man who has dined well the blue smoke clouds that slowly drift away from him; and, on the opposite side of the room, a diminutive, close-cropped waiter, worn out by the labour and heat of the day, is snatching a well-earned snooze, perched on a high stool, on whose slippery summit he perilously sways and lurches. From the café beneath rises a confused hubbub, a clinking of glasses, a clattering of dominoes, a roar of excited voices, such as in England would convey the idea of nothing less than an imminent free-fight, but here means only that a few good bourgeois and line officers are enjoying a quiet evening after their habitual manner; in the street below a shrill-voiced boy is shouting, '*Moniteur d'Algérie*, journal du soir! Achetez le *Moniteur d'Algérie*!' and from time to time, when the tumult abates for a second or two, the monotonous thrum, thrum, thrum of a guitar can be heard faintly rising from a Moorish café down by the water-side.

Here, in the billiard-room, there is silence unbroken save by the click of the balls and the occasional execrations of Mr. Barrington's friend, who plays a very fair game at the club at home, and is surprised and disgusted to find how little mastery he has over foreign balls and cues.

'Never saw such a beastly game in my life!' he exclaims wrathfully, throwing himself down upon a chair. 'Might as well play with footballs and barge-poles, by Jove! I'll trouble you for the tip of that cue! Just look at it, will you! Why, it's a couple of inches broad.'

'Ah, it's a game you have to get accustomed to,' remarks Barrington, scoring rather neatly; 'but when you understand

it it's less flukey than ours, and I really think there is more play in it.'

'Don't see any play in it at all,' growls the other; and then there is another long period of silence. The little waiter, with head thrown back and open mouth, begins to snore, and the clock in the tower of the great mosque chimes half-past ten. Presently Saint-Luc lays down his cue, and strolls dejectedly towards the sofa upon which Léon's long body is extended.

'Léon,' says he, in a sepulchral voice, 'when did you last have an earthquake here?'

'An earthquake? Oh, I hardly remember. We have a few slight shocks every year, but nobody ever thinks anything of them. Once, I remember, there was a great alarm in the middle of the night, and a good many people rushed out into the streets in very scanty apparel, and one silly old woman jumped out of window and broke her leg. But, after all, there was no damage done. Why do you ask?'

'Because I am quite convinced that we are going to have an earthquake to-night. I have never in my life felt in such low spirits as I do at this moment, and I have a sort of unaccountable sensation of dread, which, I take it, must mean that the earth is about to open and swallow me up. Not that that would be such a great misfortune after all.'

'Bah! It is a hot evening, and you are tired and out of sorts, as anyone would be who had spent three days all by himself at Fort Napoléon and then ridden back upon a lame horse. Come and have a game of billiards, and let us think no more about earthquakes. For my part, I can assure you that, whatever your wishes may be, I should dislike nothing more than being pounded to death by a falling house; and if I thought there was the slightest danger of such a thing happening, I should be out of this room in another moment. Come and play.'

Saint-Luc drops into a chair and shakes his head. 'I cannot play billiards to-night,' he says: 'I should not be able to make a single stroke. Ah, Léon, I have my own good reasons for being miserable, as you know; and I suppose there is no chance of an earthquake, or why should I alone be affected by it? You seem in excellent spirits. I saw you driving with that De Trémouville woman to-day, and she gave you a rose, and you blushed, and stuck it in your button-hole, you foolish boy. Is that why you lie smiling there like a young god on Olympus? Don't be angry; we men are all made fools of by women; we

can't escape our destiny, and would not, perhaps, if we could. Imagine yourself in paradise while you can—that is the truest wisdom. That tumbler at your elbow contains nothing but bitter vermouth and half-tepid water, but if you can bring yourself to quaff it under the impression that it is nectar, why it *is* nectar as far as you are concerned. Some day you will discover that Madame de Trémonville is—well, is a different person from what you now think her to be; but so long as you can keep your illusions, why not do so? That Englishman looks happy too. Did he drive back with her? But of course he did.'

'Well, yes; but M. de Fontvieille also took a seat inside the carriage. I heard Jeanne ask him to do so.'

'You did? She asked him to take a seat inside?' cried Saint-Luc eagerly. 'I wonder what made her do that.'

'How can I tell? She was tired of Mr. Barrington very likely. It seemed to me that they were not quite such good friends after you appeared as they had been before. Believe me, *mon cher*, you have no cause for jealousy. Mr. Barrington must return to England very soon now, and then——'

'Ah, then!'

Bang! Bang! from the further end of the room. Barrington's friend, in a frantic effort to 'screw,' has driven his cue through the cloth, and sent one of the balls spinning off the table. The little waiter, rudely awakened from his slumbers, loses his balance, falls from his perch with a loud crash, and then, picking himself up, and immediately recovering his presence of mind, pipes out

'*C'est cinquante francs le premier accroc, messieurs.*'

'Oh, oh! I like that!' cries the delinquent, indignantly. 'Cinquante francs—rubbish! Look here, you little beggar! Regardez ici—et là—et là,' pointing to the traces of several previous injuries to the cloth. 'Coupé all over the place, you know. Je paierai cinq francs, and not another centime—so you needn't say any more about it.'

The waiter shrugs his shoulders doubtfully, and says he will consult the 'patron;' and peace being restored, Barrington resumes his cue, and, adroitly drawing the balls into a corner, finishes the game with a break of ten.

The defeated player paid his stake, settled with the waiter, and after making some brief but trenchant observations upon the game of French billiards, took himself off. Then Barrington, who was in high good humour, both because he had won

his game and on account of other reasons, strolled across the room and poked Léon in the ribs with his cue.

‘Well, De Mersac,’ said he, ‘what have you been doing with yourself all day? I was at your house this afternoon, and thought I should have seen you there. How do you do, M. de Saint-Luc? You have just come back from Fort Napoléon, I suppose?’

Old Mr. Ashley, whose property adjoins Barrington’s more extensive one, and who has always lived upon the best of terms with his neighbour, has been heard to say that the latter would be one of the pleasantest-mannered men in England if only he could get out of the habit of talking to others as though he were the Prince of Wales; and, indeed, it is true that there is a certain prosperous affability in the demeanour of this fortunate gentleman which men who are out of luck or out of temper sometimes find it hard to bear. Saint-Luc was too well-bred to answer his rival otherwise than politely; but if he could have followed the bent of his own inclinations, and reverted to the customs of a primitive state of society, he would then and there have arisen and pommelled him soundly. That the man should look so disgustingly contented and happy was, perhaps, not his fault; but that allusion to Fort Napoléon might surely have been spared.

Then there was an interval of silence, after which Léon swung his long legs off the sofa, stretched himself, yawned, and said he thought he would go and look in at the club.

‘I am going home to bed; and if you are wise you will follow my example,’ observed Barrington, who knew very well what ‘looking in at the club’ meant.

‘Ah, but I am not wise,’ rejoined Léon, rather tartly; for, in common with the rest of humanity, he disliked nothing so much as good advice.

He added, ‘You are coming, are you not, Saint-Luc?’

The Vicomte fumbled in his waistcoat pocket, and drew out a handful of coins and notes, which he proceeded to count. ‘Yes,’ he answered, when he had finished his sum; ‘I find I have got three hundred francs about me. That much I am prepared to lose, but I shall retire as soon as my pockets are empty.’

‘And I,’ observed Léon, ‘have got exactly fifty-five francs fifty centimes; and I have no intention of retiring before I am sleepy.’

‘Then I can only hope, for your sake, that you will be sleepy soon,’ said Barrington, putting on his hat. ‘Good-night,

monsieur. Good-night, De Mersac. I dare say I shall see you to-morrow.'

'Virtue has spread her wings and flown,' remarked Saint-Luc, as the swing door closed behind the Englishman. 'You are now alone with Vice, as fitly represented in my humble person. I beg you to observe, however, that I decline the additional rôle of Temptation—I will even take upon myself to say that, much as I enjoy your society, I should prefer to say good-night now.'

'Why?' asked Léon, rather affronted.

'Firstly, because they are playing lansquenet at the club to-night, and lansquenet is, of all games that I know, the one at which large sums are most easily lost. Secondly, because there is no luck in the air to-night. Thirdly, because you have not got enough money in your pockets. I have three hundred francs, the loss of which will sober me. You will lose what you have in a few minutes, after which you will take to paper, and become reckless. Also, your head is not so cool as mine to start with.'

Looked upon as a deterrent, the observation was scarcely a happy one. Nobody—above all, no young man—likes to be told that his head is not cool; nor is it flattering to be cautioned against the seductive nature of any amusement by a man who is himself about to engage in it.

'You talk as if I were a baby,' Léon answered in a tone of some annoyance. 'I have played lansquenet before now, and I am not such a fool as not to know when to stop.'

Saint-Luc shrugged his shoulders. 'I have warned you,' said he; 'I could do no more. I hope you will recollect that to-morrow morning when you wake up with a headache, and try to calculate the amount of your losses. Probably, however, you will blame me—and so will others. That will be nothing more than my usual luck.'

'I shall do nothing of the sort,' answered Léon; 'and I don't know whom you mean by others. When I lose my money, I generally keep the fact to myself.'

'Do you?' said Saint-Luc. 'I have never been able to achieve such reticence. But it does not much matter. Things can hardly be much worse with me than they are already. Shall we go?'

Léon understood it all, and was not best pleased. Jeanne had been the kindest of sisters to him, and he had a reverence and respect for her rather filial than fraternal; still few sons

can bear with equanimity the idea that their mother has requested a stranger to keep them out of mischief, and Léon, as he held open the door for his friend to pass out, said to himself that the time had come for him to shake off feminine rule.

The two men descended the stairs together in silence, and a few steps brought them to the door of the club, which occupied the first floor of a large corner house. The room which they presently entered was a lofty and spacious one, lighted by a big crystal chandelier, and furnished with a multiplicity of easy-chairs. In some of these a few members were dozing; a little knot of idlers were smoking on the balcony, and at the further end of the room some eight or ten men, mostly officers in the *Chasseurs d'Afrique*, were congregated round a card-table. One of the latter wheeled round as the newcomers approached, and beckoned to them.

'Come and bring us a change of luck,' he cried. 'There never was such a dull game as this since the world began! Would you believe that we have been playing for three-quarters of an hour, and that nobody has lost a sou except myself, who am minus three napoleons.'

'I have lost five,' said another man, in a rather aggrieved tone.

'And ought to have lost five hundred,' retorted the first speaker. 'What is the use of playing with a man like you, who always make a point of throwing good money after bad, if nobody is ever to get a deal? I don't think any single dealer has had more than two turns.'

'Be comforted, De Monceaux,' said Saint-Luc, seating himself on the left hand of the grumbler. 'I have brought three hundred francs with me for the express purpose of losing them, and perhaps some share of the plunder may find its way into your pocket.'

'Not if you sit there,' rejoined the other. 'Your stake will be covered three times over before I get a chance of putting anything on. If you think you are going to have bad luck, for Heaven's sake seat yourself above instead of below me.'

But Léon had taken the chair next to that which Saint-Luc now occupied, and the kind-hearted Vicomte thought it might be for the young man's benefit that he should have a mentor at his elbow, so he shook his head.

'It is hardly worth while to change places now,' he said. 'But we are interrupting the game. Whose deal is it?'

'It is mine, I believe,' answered De Monceaux; but I have no confidence in these cards. I propose that we have fresh ones. and begin over again.'

So two new packs were brought, and being dealt round, the lowest card fell to Saint-Luc, who thus became dealer, much to the disgust of his neighbour.

‘Is that what you call bad luck?’ exclaimed that ill-used person, indignantly. ‘I might have known how it would be! and now I will lay a hundred francs to fifty that you win six times, provided you leave the stake up.’

Saint-Luc took the bet, laid a napoleon on the table as his stake, and began to deal.

CHAPTER XII.

LANSQUENET.

Most people, probably, are acquainted with the rules of lansquenet; but, for the benefit of those who are not, a short explanation shall be given—the more willingly as the game is one of an engaging simplicity. The dealer, after laying down a stake, the amount of which is left to his option, turns up the first two cards of the pack, one for himself and one for the table; he then proceeds to deal out the cards till one of the same number as either of those displayed appears. Should the table win, he loses his stake and the deal passes; but if his own card prove successful, he may either pocket his winnings and surrender his deal to the next player, or leave both winnings and stake up, and continue. The stake may be covered by one or more of the players, the left-hand neighbour of the dealer having the first choice. In the present instance, Léon being seated next to Saint-Luc, at once covered the modest napoleon staked by his friend.

Saint-Luc won, and left the two gold pieces on the table, and Léon once more monopolised the play. The dealer won again, and again, and yet again, but at the fifth time the luck turned, and the young marquis had the satisfaction of receiving back the scraps of paper on which he had scribbled the amount of his debts, together with twenty francs of winnings.

‘That is not the way to play lansquenet, my friend,’ whispered Saint-Luc; but Léon, in answer to the good-natured warning, only shrugged his shoulders impatiently, and muttered, ‘*Je sais ce que je fais*,’ which, if true, was a state-

ment little creditable to his understanding. He put up forty francs and lost them immediately. Then, for a time, he got no chance of losing or winning, and sat drumming on the table and fidgeting restlessly in his chair after the manner of inexperienced gamblers, who are seldom contented unless they can be in the thick of the fray.

The game did not at first prove an exciting one. There were no long deals, very little money changed hands, and at the end of an hour the only player upon whom Fortune seemed to have smiled at all was Saint-Luc, who had a little pile of gold before him; whereas Léon, whose few coins had long since vanished, had sent some three hundred francs worth of his signatures to different parts of the table, and was a little inclined to be querulous over his losses.

Poor Léon had not yet learnt that the first duty of a gambler is to preserve an aspect of equanimity, and that though men will bear with fools, and will even show marvellous patience with rogues, they will not tolerate one who bursts into lamentations over his bad luck. He offended in this way more than once in the course of the evening, but, perhaps, in consideration of his inexperience, he might have been allowed to escape unrebuked, had he not had the misfortune to fall foul of M. de Monceaux. That gentleman, who was no longer in his first youth, and had long since discovered that the pastimes of this world are but weariness and vexation of spirit, unless they can be made to conduce to its comforts, was accustomed in card-playing, as in all other pursuits, to regulate his conduct in accordance with certain well-defined principles. Throughout the evening he had been playing with more skill than good fortune, but he serenely bided his time, knowing that to him who waits opportunity will surely arrive. Now it came to pass that Léon, in pursuance of his absurd system of doubling, had taken up the whole of the stake during a rather longer deal than usual. He was some distance away from the dealer, but none of the intervening players had cared to interfere with the young man after the first round, till some eight hundred francs were on the table. It was then that M. de Monceaux, having carefully calculated that the chances were now about ten to one in his favour, stepped in, and, in the exercise of his undoubted right as next player to the dealer, covered the whole sum, won it, and quietly swept it down.

'C'est trop fort !' exclaimed Léon, throwing himself back in his chair. And indeed it must be admitted that the incident

was one which might have tried the patience of many an older man.

'I beg your pardon,' said De Monceaux suavely, bending forward as he spoke, 'you said something?'

Léon frowned, but made no reply.

'Perhaps,' continued De Monceaux, with increasing politeness, 'M. le Marquis has not often played this game. Am I wrong in conjecturing from his manner that he believes me to have infringed some rule? In such a case he would do well to refer the matter to the committee of the club. Or if anything in my personal conduct should have displeased M. le Marquis, nothing would give me greater pleasure than to——'

'Nonsense!' interposed Saint-Luc hastily. 'Nobody is complaining of you, De Monceaux; and we are all waiting for you to deal.'

De Monceaux shrugged his shoulders, picked up the cards, won three times running, and then took down his gains.

'I trust M. le Marquis does not object to the deal passing,' he remarked, as he handed the pack to his neighbour.

'I object to nothing,' returned Léon, wrathfully; 'but this I must say——'

He was cut short by a smart blow across his shins. Saint-Luc had opened his long legs like a pair of scissors and bestowed this gentle correction impartially on his right hand and on his left.

'Be quiet, Léon,' he muttered; and then, turning to De Monceaux, 'Hold your tongue, you old fire-eater, and don't quarrel with boys. If you must fight, come out with me to-morrow morning, and you shall see whether I am still as good a match for you as I used to be with the foils at Saint-Cyr.'

At this De Monceaux, who was a good-natured fellow enough, laughed and said, 'No, thank you,' and so peace was restored.

Often afterwards Saint-Luc wondered whether it was destiny or mere absence of mind that led him to begin his deal by putting up so large a stake as two hundred francs. He had hitherto taken little interest in the game, having altogether failed to find sufficient excitement therein to divert his thoughts from the channel in which they had so steadily run of late; and though the corporeal presence of the Vicomte de Saint-Luc had been visible at the card-table, pale, handsome, imperturbable, staking according to the dictates of prudence and winning moderately—the man himself had been wandering sadly enough

in distant places—under the stars at Fort Napoléon, in the garden of the Campagne de Mersac, through the empty rooms of his own deserted Norman château—who knows where? The little dispute between Léon and De Monceaux had brought him back to realities for a moment, but now he had drifted away again, and pushed up the ten gold pieces mechanically, forgetting, perhaps, that he was no longer in Paris, but in an Algerian club, where such sums were more or less of a phenomenon.

Léon immediately covered the stake. The occurrences of the last five minutes had not tended to soothe the irritability of that foolish young man, or to bring him to a calmer and wiser frame of mind. He was angry with himself, which was reasonable enough; he was very angry with De Monceaux, which was perhaps excusable; but it was certainly most unjust of him to be furious against Saint-Luc, who had just got him out of an awkward scrape. It must, however, be admitted that gratitude for such good offices is seldom forthcoming upon the spur of the moment. But lastly, and most foolishly of all, Léon was indignant with Luck; and it was with an insane determination to conquer that pitiless abstraction that he pushed a slip of paper representing two hundred francs in front of Saint-Luc's ten napoleons, and lost it. Four hundred, then eight hundred, then sixteen hundred francs went the same way. Saint-Luc went on dealing, and Léon set his teeth and continued to stake.

The rest of the players, being thus debarred from taking any part in the game, looked on with calmness not unmixed with disgust.

When a man begins his deal by putting up two hundred francs, it is natural to expect that the greater part of the company may be able to secure some interest in the result, or failing that, that they may at least have the consolation of witnessing an exciting contest between him and the adventurous gambler who has chosen to oppose him alone. But in the present instance there was no prospect of any such solace. It was evident enough that Saint-Luc did not choose to win his friend's money; that he would go on till he lost; that the original stake would be the only sum that would change hands, and that the turning up of card after card was, therefore, a pure waste of time.

'I will never sit down to a card-table with that young

inbecile again,' muttered De Monceaux to his neighbour. To which the other replied—

'Nor I—unless he likes to play with me alone.'

Meanwhile Saint-Luc was having a run of good fortune such as had not been witnessed in that club for many a long day. Time after time the dealer's card came up victorious, and some languid interest began to be manifested in the large amount of money on the table, which had now reached no less a sum than fifty thousand francs odd. The figures might be nearly nominal, still more than one person present felt a thrill on seeing before him the palpable result of a two hundred francs' stake and nine successive wins. A few bets were exchanged as to how long the luck would hold; and when Léon, with hands that trembled a little, added another piece of paper to those already before the dealer, thus making up a total of over one hundred thousand francs, there was a general hush and expectancy, and all eyes were turned upon the dealer.

Saint-Luc, impassive and indifferent, took the pack in his hand and turned up the first two cards—two tens. There was a general stir and hum, and somebody called out—

'The dealer takes down half the stakes.'

'Not unless he likes, I think,' said Saint-Luc, looking up. 'I prefer to leave it as it is.'

'You have no choice,' said De Monceaux. 'We made it a rule here long ago that where two cards of equal value were turned up, the dealer must either take down the whole stake and let the deal pass, or half of it, and continue to deal.'

'I never heard of such a rule in Paris,' answered Saint-Luc, manifestly annoyed.

'It is the rule here though,' persisted De Monceaux. 'We had several discussions about the matter, and we all agreed that it would be more satisfactory to oblige the dealer to take advantage of exceptionally favourable circumstances. There were some people who felt a delicacy—you understand.'

Of course there was nothing more to be said. If you play in a club you must conform to its rules, however absurd. Saint-Luc, with a slightly clouded brow, withdrew paper to the amount of fifty-one thousand two hundred francs. The like amount remaining on the table was at once covered by Léon, whose agitation had now passed his powers of concealment. Come what might, he must now lose over two thousand pounds, and how to raise the money he scarcely knew.

Saint-Luc turned up the next two cards—two sevens! Léon

might have used any language he pleased about his luck now without fear of shocking anyone's sense of propriety. The sympathies of the whole company were with him, and found vent in a subdued murmur which circled round the table. It was indeed a more cruel blow than any man could have anticipated that he should not only lose his money twice running through an altogether exceptional coincidence but that he should lose it to a man who had plainly shown that he did not desire to win it. Léon, however, held his peace. He had defied luck, and had got thoroughly beaten; the shock had stunned and sobered him at the same time. One thing only remained for him to do. He once more covered the dealer's stake, and, resting his head on his hand, awaited the end.

What that end would be no one could doubt. The appearance of another tie would have been little short of a miracle; the dealer had already won eleven times in succession, and the chances against his doing so again were almost incalculable. Moreover, it was quite clear that he intended to go on till he should lose. Léon himself could not but perceive this; yet his hands grew cold and his heart thumped as Saint-Luc proceeded to turn up the cards—a nine for himself and a two for his antagonist. With calm, almost cruel deliberation, and in a profound silence, the Vicomte went on through the pack. Ten—king—three—five—would it never come? Somebody in the distance slammed a door, and Saint-Luc paused for a moment and looked over his shoulder. Then he continued as slowly as before. Eight—six—ace—seven—four—*nine*! For the twelfth time the stake had fallen to the dealer.

‘And I who never, in the course of a long and eventful career, have won as much as six times running!’ exclaimed De Monceaux, naturally indignant at such a waste of Fortune's best gifts. ‘*Mon cher,*’ he added, turning to Saint-Luc, ‘I propose to you that we start to-morrow for Monaco. I will get a week's leave from my general; I will watch your play and humbly follow it, and I will return here rich enough to offer the best dinner that Algiers can produce to all the company.’

But Saint-Luc paid no attention to him. He glanced round the table, looked rather oddly for an instant at Léon's pale face and flashing eyes, and then, gathering together the accumulation of paper before him, delivered up the cards to his neighbour, remarking calmly, as he leant back in his chair, ‘The deal passes.’

The reader may, perhaps, at some time have happened to

watch two dogs playing at fighting—snapping, snarling, showing glistening fangs, and rolling one another over in the dust, but all the time with an evident tacit understanding that there was no real quarrel between them. And then he may have seen one of them, with a swift, sudden change from play into grim earnest, fasten upon the other and kill him then and there, before even the poor brute has had time to understand what is happening to him. Greyhounds, collies, and other sharp-nosed dogs will do so sometimes. Anyone who has witnessed such a little tragedy, and recollects what his feelings were at the time towards the murderer, may form an idea of the light in which Saint-Luc's unexpected action caused him to be regarded by those who sat at the table with him. No one spoke—indeed, there was nothing to be said; what had been done was strictly in accordance with the rules of the game; but there was not a man present who did not feel that the poor young marquis had been not only cruelly treated by his friend, but morally defrauded. Who could suppose that he would have gone on staking in the mad way he had done if he had not shared the general conviction that his enormous losses were not meant to be serious? And the fact that Saint-Luc had actually won over four thousand pounds already made his conduct the more inexcusable. In the first glow of their generous sympathy and indignation, these young fellows would willingly have placed their purses at the disposition of the victim, though, to be sure, that would have helped but little, for not one of them could have paid a twentieth part of what he owed.

Léon, in this trying crisis of his life, bore himself with a dignity and fortitude which at once blotted out the memory of his previous petulance. He rose slowly, and stood for a moment, resting his hands upon the table and looking round him. To his dying day Léon will remember that scene. The great airy room with its polished floor and its lace curtains swaying in the night breeze; the green card-table flooded with soft light from above, the gold-laced staff-uniforms and the pale blue jackets of the Chasseurs d'Afrique, the circle of curious, startled, upturned faces, De Monceaux frowning a little, and twisting his waxed moustache, Saint-Luc staring steadily before him, with a countenance devoid of any expression whatever—all these, together with a dozen other petty details, make up a picture which Léon can summon up at will, and which has often revisited him when he would have been very glad to forget it. He remembers, too, the odd feeling of unreality which

took hold of him, the half doubt as to his own identity, his wonder at finding his voice so clear and steady and under control.

‘I think I will go away now,’ he said. ‘I have lost a good deal of money—rather more than I can afford. I shall be able to pay everybody to-morrow, except M. de Saint-Luc, whom I shall have to ask for a little time.’ In truth the poor lad hardly knew what he was saying, but felt only that something must be said, and that he must not disgrace himself. He paused—then bowing, added, ‘Good-night, messieurs,’ and walked across the room and out of the house.

Those who were left sat in silence till his echoing footsteps died away in the distance, and then De Monceaux remarked, ‘That young man will go and drown himself.’

‘No, he will not,’ answered Saint-Luc, with a quiet smile. ‘He is a brave fellow, and will turn out well yet.’

‘Parbleu!—if you have left him the means, he may,’ returned De Monceaux, rather roughly, for he was disgusted at his friend’s cynicism.

Saint-Luc turned in his chair, so as to face the aide-de-camp, and looked him full in the eyes. ‘A little time ago,’ he said, ‘you were ready to kill young De Mersac because he did not seem satisfied with your manner of playing. Do you want to quarrel with me now for following your example?’

‘I seek no quarrels, and refuse none,’ replied De Monceaux, curtly. ‘For the moment I am going home to bed; I have had enough of play for one night.’ And so saying, he rose, buckled on his sword, and strode away.

Perhaps he was not sorry to escape without further words. Had it been a question of challenging any other man than Saint-Luc, he might have been less placable, but he knew that he might as well stand up against a mitrailleuse as against that notorious duellist. And, after all, it was not his business to fight other men’s battles. His departure was the signal for a general move, and presently Saint-Luc found himself the sole tenant of the club.

Léon, meanwhile, had wandered out into the street, with no very distinct idea as to where he was or what he intended to do. After a time he found himself sitting on one of the benches in the empty Place du Gouvernement, and, taking out a pencil and a bit of paper, began to add up his losses. The calculation did not take long. To De Monceaux and one or two other players he owed some small sums amounting in all to some-

thing over fifty pounds, and to Saint-Luc exactly two hundred and fifty-five thousand eight hundred francs. For a long time he sat staring stupidly at the figures, and struggling in vain to realise the magnitude of the catastrophe that had occurred; then, all of a sudden, the true nature of his position seemed to flash across him with horrible distinctness. He was very nearly ruined. Every invested penny he had in the world would not realise the required amount. He had sold out a large portion of his patrimony since he had come of age, acting under good advice in so doing, and expending the ready money thus acquired in the purchase of fresh land and in farm improvements. Within the last few months he had bought a great many costly agricultural machines, which would, he was convinced, make him a richer man in the long run, though it was only too certain that, if sold at the present time, they would not fetch half their value. Upon the whole, it would cost him a great deal more than ten thousand pounds to pay Saint-Luc. Nor was there anyone to whom he could apply for temporary aid. The Duchess had only a life-interest in her income, M. de Fontvieille had long since sunk his small fortune in an annuity, and Jeanne's share of her father's estate was, of course, held in trust for her. What was to be done? Léon could see nothing for it but that he must sell his house and part of his lands for what they would fetch, and retire to that lonely farm on the Metidja plain of which mention has already been made. Jeanne, he thought, might live, till her marriage, with the Duchess, who would now have to seek a new home. It was all very hard, poor Léon could not help thinking. A man makes a fool of himself during one brief half-hour, and is crippled for the rest of his life. Surely the punishment is out of all proportion to the offence! And not the least part of his misery was the anticipation of the story he would have to relate at home in the course of a few hours. How should he ever bring himself to tell what must be told? Could he call his sister, who had devoted her whole life to him, and the kindly, worldly, fussy old woman who had treated him with all a mother's fondness, if not with quite a mother's discretion, and who had spoiled, admired, and idolised him from his cradle—could he face them, and say, 'My good people, I am very sorry, but you will have to leave your old home, and the familiar rooms, and the garden, and the orchard, and the woods that you loved, and look out for some much less spacious habitation. I lost a small fortune at lansquenet last night, and now I have got to sell house and

land, and make a fresh start. As for you, you will be a little pinched; you will have to economise here and there, and do without some of the small luxuries which you have come to consider as necessities. I shall not be able to live with you myself——’

‘My God! I can’t do it!’ broke off poor Léon aloud.

And then, for a moment, some such thought as that which had occurred to De Monceaux did cross his mind. Yonder lay the sea, calm, silent, and grey with the first glimmer of dawn. It would be easy enough to take a boat and row out beyond the breakwater, after sunrise, and bathe. The best of swimmers may be seized with cramp—there would be no scandal. But here common sense stepped in, and pointed out that in this direction lay no hope of honourable escape. It was certain that Saint-Luc must be paid; and Léon, even if he avoided the grief and shame of meeting those dearest to him again, must leave them, as a legacy, some record of his debt. He tried to summon up all his courage, and said to himself that since he was obliged to do what he would rather die than do, he would at least go through it without flinching. He would tell his story in as few words as possible, he thought, and get it over. There would be no use in weeping, or execrating his folly, or entreating for pardon. They would understand better than he could express to them how miserable he was. Yes, he would tell Jeanne first and then the Duchess, and in ten minutes it would all be done. He had heard of surgical operations which had lasted much longer than that, and men had lived through them, and been able to speak of them calmly in after years. But when he pictured to himself what would follow—the Duchess’s tears and lamentations, as she made her preparations for departure—Jeanne moving silently from room to room, packing and arranging, with a grave, sorrowful face, worse than any outspoken reproach, his fortitude gave way, and throwing his arms over the back of the bench he hid his face in them and groaned.

After a time some one came behind him and touched him gently on the shoulder.

He started up, and saw Saint-Luc.

‘Oh, is it you, Saint-Luc?’ said he, in a hurried, confused manner. ‘I will be with you directly. I must just speak to my sister and the Duchess—it will not take ten minutes—and then I will come back. I have added up what I owe you, and it comes to two hundred and fifty-five thousand eight hundred

francs, I think. I shall be able to pay you before very long; but you will understand that it takes a little time.'

Saint-Luc did not reply, but, passing his arm through Léon's, led him away towards the Hôtel d'Orient. The young man made no resistance till they had reached the door, then he started and drew back. 'Where are we?' he asked, pushing his hat back from his forehead. 'This is your hotel, is it not?' I think I must have fallen asleep. I must be going home now.'

'Not at this hour,' said Saint-Luc, quietly. 'It is morning already, and you would disturb them. You can have the bedroom next to mine, and if you have anything to say about money matters, we will discuss it at breakfast. In the meantime, the best thing you can do is to take off your clothes and get to sleep.'

The young man made some faint effort at opposition, but he was too confused and weary to hold out long; and half an hour afterwards he was in bed, sleeping as soundly as if the events of the evening had been merely a troubled dream.

Saint-Luc peeped in at him presently through the half-open door, and then stealing away on tip-toe to his own window, lighted a cigar and watched the sun rise from behind the shadowy Djurdjura range.

CHAPTER XIII.

LOVE v. PRUDENCE.

LÉON's non-appearance at breakfast did not give rise to any anxiety at the Campagne de Mersac. In that easy-going household no one was expected to give an account of him or herself before the dinner-hour; and, as for its master, if, as often happened, business or pleasure took him into the country for a day or two at a time, it was only by chance that he gave notice of his intended absence. Jeanne, therefore, when she heard from Fanchette that M. le Marquis had not returned on the previous evening, felt no misgivings as to her brother's safety, but only some slight disappointment; for the Duchess, who had aged a good deal of late, seldom showed herself now before three o'clock, and eating alone is dull work at the best of times. Jeanne, who was not of an age or temperament to care about

food for its own sake, soon disposed of her solitary repast. She took a book into the dining-room with her, hastily swallowed, while she read, such amount of sustenance as seemed necessary to support life, and then stepped out on to the verandah.

It was a cloudless summer morning; the town below was baking and sweltering in the heat, but here, on the breezy hill top, little puffs of cool wind rose and fell, bending the heads of the roses and the stiff white lilies, driving the spray of the fountain across the gravel walks, and rousing a soft sleepy whispering among the pine branches. The winter and spring were at an end; the rains were done with now till October at earliest, and soon the long, weary, hot season would set in, and the grass would grow browner day by day, and the leaves would wither on the trees, and the spikes of the aloes blacken and fall, and there would be no more roses, and every babbling stream would be silenced. But as yet the woods and meadows were still of a vivid green, the garden was ablaze with flowers, many-coloured butterflies fluttered and poised themselves over the beds, little bright-eyed lizards darted hither and thither upon the stone walls. All nature was astir and rejoicing in the sunshine and warmth; and the heat was not too great for comfort, but only sufficient to afford a good excuse for idleness.

Jeanne, who was by no means an idle person, had got through her day's duties long ago. She had ordered the dinner, added up her accounts, visited the animals, read aloud to the Duchess for an hour, and had now earned the right to drop into a rocking-chair and rest. She swayed gently to and fro, one foot resting on the ground, and presently her book slipped from her hand and she began to dream. Facing her, beyond the glittering blue bay and the sultry haze of the plain, rose the distant purple mountains behind whose shadowy folds and ridges Fort Napoléon lay hidden. Was M. de Saint-Luc still there? she wondered, or was he even now wending his way homewards, lonely and disconsolate? Poor M. de Saint-Luc! Jeanne had never known how much she really liked him till she had found herself obliged to deal him the cruellest blow that a woman can inflict upon a man. Remembering, with a pang of conscience, how unjust she had been to him, how she had snubbed him and tried to hurt his feelings, and with what quiet patience he had borne it all, she could almost have found it in her heart to wish that it had been possible to her to give him a different answer. But that could never have been; and since things were as they were, how much better it was that he should have

spoken out and heard the truth. She would be able to treat him as a friend now; there would be no more misunderstanding; and probably he, on his side, would abstain from uttering those wearisome, laboured compliments which had sometimes made his presence positively hateful to her. 'If he had only known,' thought Jeanne, 'what a foolish thing flattery is, and how it disgusts all sensible people! How different Mr. Barrington is! With him one can talk and feel at one's ease; he does not sigh and roll his eyes, and nauseate one with silly speeches.'

But when Jeanne reached this point in her soliloquy, a slight conscious smile rose to her eyes and lips, and the faintest flush in the world appeared upon her cheeks. For the truth was that Mr. Barrington had spent the greater part of the preceding day with her, and had said some very flattering things indeed. But then, to be sure, they had not been silly—or she had not thought so. Alas! one man may steal a horse and another must not look over a hedge. Who gets justice in this world? And, for the matter of that, who wants it? If some people rate us below our proper value, others, no doubt, think of us more highly than we deserve; and were it possible to strike a balance and induce everybody to view our failings and merits with the same eyes, all the sunshine would fade out of life, and a dull business become duller yet. As for Barrington, he has been over-estimated on all hands throughout his life, and will doubtless continue to be so to the end of the chapter. Here was Mademoiselle de Mersac, who was worth a thousand of him, thinking over his wise and witty sayings, dwelling upon his many accomplishments, mentally recapitulating the long talks she had had with him during that Kabylean excursion and since, and finding so much pleasure in this employment that she failed to note the passage of time, and was quite startled when a clock in the room behind her struck two. Then, remembering that she had some work to take to the sisters at the neighbouring convent, she rose, with a half sigh, fetched her hat and a huge white umbrella, and whistling to Turco, moved slowly away in the hot sunshine.

Five minutes' walk across the dusty high road and through a corn-field brought her to the vast, white dreary building, with its long rows of small windows and its arched gateway surmounted by an iron cross. One of the sisters peered at her through a lattice, and then opened the door and let her into the cool gloom of the hall. Turco stretched himself out upon the doorstep, and panted, and snapped at the flies.

When Jeanne emerged, half an hour afterwards, and gazed with dazzled eyes into the blinding glare without, she became aware of somebody on a chestnut horse who dismounted as she drew nearer to him, and took off his hat, exclaiming, 'So you have come at last! I saw your dog at the door, and I thought I would wait for you; but you were such a long, long time in appearing that I began to be afraid that you were not in the convent after all.'

'How do you do, Mr. Barrington?' said Jeanne, holding out her hand in her grave, composed way. 'I am sorry that you waited in the heat.'

'Why are you sorry? For my sake, or for your own? If I am a bore, I will go away.'

'Oh, no!' answered Jeanne, smiling a little. 'On the contrary, I am very glad to see you; only if I had known you were there, I would have come out sooner. I was chatting with old Sister Marthe, who is fond of a gossip, and I always like the convent, it is so quiet and peaceful there.'

'Isn't it a little like a prison?' asked Barrington, glancing back at the cold, bare structure. He had passed his arm through his horse's bridle, and was walking beside Jeanne towards the high road.

'I do not find it so,' she answered. 'Often I think that I shall end by taking the veil.'

'Good gracious, how horrible!' exclaimed Barrington aghast. 'What can have put such an idea into your head? You, of all people! Why, you would not be able to bear the life for a week.'

'How can you tell that?' asked Jeanne, raising her grave eyes to his for a moment. 'You have not seen the life, and perhaps you do not know very well what would suit me. I think I could be happy enough in a convent; all the sisters are contented. I do not speak of the present, of course: I have other things to do—Léon to look after, and Madame de Breuil. But changes will come: Léon will marry, and the Duchess is very old. One must think of the future sometimes.'

'I hope,' said Barrington, 'that the future has some brighter destiny than that in store for you.'

She made no reply, and the pair walked on silently side by side for another hundred yards or so. Barrington, when he alluded to the possibility of some bright future destiny for his companion, had a very distinct idea in his own mind of what he wished that destiny to be, but he had not yet quite decided

that he would offer it to her. Or rather, though he believed his decision to be firm, and, indeed, had declared to himself more than once during the past four-and-twenty hours that it was so, he was not quite sure that he would take the present opportunity of revealing it. He was generally considered to be an impetuous, enthusiastic, romantic sort of fellow ; but those who knew him best were aware that his character contained, by way of counterpoise, a strong underlying vein of prudence ; and, moreover, that this prudence had a way of coming forward just in the nick of time, and had on many occasions snatched back its favoured possessor from the very brink of some rash action. He was very much in love with Jeanne de Mersac—more so, he thought, than he had ever been with any woman ; but then he was also very much in love with himself, and the latter attachment, being of longer standing, was probably more deeply seated than the former. He would not, of course, have admitted this—indeed, he considered himself to be a man of singularly unselfish proclivities—but he had always looked upon marriage as a very serious step indeed, and one not to be taken without much forethought and deliberation. Without having given the subject any very profound consideration, he had nevertheless been, for some years past, pretty firmly convinced that, when the time should come for him to take a wife, his wisest course would be to select a lady for whom he could feel a sincere respect and esteem without having any romantic affection for her. The eldest Miss Ashley might do, or Lady Jane East, or one of the Fetherston girls. Any one of these ladies, and a good many others too, would, as he was aware, be persuaded without difficulty to share his humble lot, and dispense the hospitalities of Broadridge Court. The very best kind of wife obtainable—so Barrington had thought—was a woman neither above nor beneath her husband in rank, neither strikingly handsome nor absolutely plain, neither too clever nor too stupid—a woman who would dress well and manage her household properly, and keep on good terms with the neighbours, and raise no objection if her husband proposed to leave her for a few months at a time while he sought a relaxation in a yachting or shooting trip. Such had been his not very lofty ideal, and to it he had remained faithful through many a desperate flirtation. And was he now to throw all prudence to the winds for the sake of this pale, stately girl, whom he knew to be proud and fond of her own way, who might not improbably prove exacting, and who was a Frenchwoman and a Roman Catholic?

He had put this question to himself, with some anxiety, the night before, and had finally answered it in the affirmative. True love, he thought, should be strong enough to survive sacrifices, and if any such should be called for from him, was she not worth them? He would find an opportunity of seeing her the next day, and would tell her all. A tinge of uncertainty as to what her reply might be contributed to strengthen this heroic determination. And yet, now that the propitious moment had come, he found himself doubting, hesitating, weighing the old pros and cons over again. The upshot of it all was that when he broke the silence, it was only to say:—

‘I suppose you will be at the Governor-General’s ball to-night?’

‘Yes, I think so. Madame de Vaublanc has offered to take me. And you?’

‘I shall certainly go if you do.’

Then there was another pause, which lasted until the gates of the Campagne were reached.

‘May I come in?’ asked Barrington. ‘I want to consult your brother about my horse, who has not been feeding properly for the last day or two. I fancy the heat affects him.’

The pretext was a sufficiently shallow one, but it answered its purpose.

‘Yes, pray do,’ answered Jeanne. ‘I am not sure whether Léon is at home, but I will find out.’

She lifted a small silver whistle which she carried at her belt, and blew a shrill summons upon it, in answer to which one of the Arab grooms presently came running out.

‘Yes,’ the man said, in answer to his mistress’s inquiry, ‘M. le Marquis had returned, and had asked for mademoiselle; but hearing that she was out, he had ridden away again.’

‘I daresay he will be back before long,’ Jeanne remarked. ‘Shall we go into the house and wait for him? It is too hot to sit out of doors.’

Barrington followed her into the cool, darkened drawing-room, and, sinking into an easy chair by her side, let his eyes roam abstractedly over the glazed tiles, the Persian rugs, the low divans, the nooks and recesses which had become so familiar to him. The piano had been left open, with a piece of music on the desk; his own picture of Jeanne on the balcony stood on an easel in one corner; on every table were vases and bowls filled with roses.

‘What a charming room this is!’ he exclaimed.

'Yes, it is a nice room,' said Jeanne. Barrington had made the same remark so many times before that the subject appeared to her to be pretty well exhausted.

'How commonplace and vulgar English houses will look to me after this !' he went on. 'My own drawing-room is tastefully furnished with white and green-striped satin ; the carpet is white, with gigantic ferns and cabbage roses sprawling over it, and the paper, which also has a white ground, exhibits a series of wonderful green birds sitting in gold cages. I often think it is the most appallingly hideous room I ever beheld.'

'Why do you not re-furnish it then ?' asked Jeanne, laughing.

'I suppose I shall one of these days. Just now it would be hardly worth while, for nobody ever enters it. The rest of the house is well enough, and I have an affection for the old place, though it is dreary work living there all alone. I wonder whether *you* would like it ?'

Jeanne not feeling herself called upon to hazard any conjecture as to whether Mr. Barrington's house were likely to please her or not, he resumed presently, 'I am sure you would like the garden. People tell me that the turf at Broadridge is the oldest in the county, and we have always been famous for our roses. There are some fine old trees in the park too. I should like you to see it all. Isn't there a chance of your paying your cousins a visit some time or other ?'

'Not very much, I am afraid,' answered Jeanne. 'They have asked me several times, and I have always wished to go to England ; but it is difficult for me to get away, especially in the summer, for then I go to Switzerland with the Duchess, and, as Léon does not accompany us, it would be impossible for me to leave her.'

'To Switzerland ? Dear me ! I was thinking of going to Switzerland myself this summer,' said Barrington, who had not until that moment had any intention of the sort. 'I wonder whether we are likely to meet.'

Jeanne's face brightened perceptibly. 'I hope we may,' she replied cordially. 'Shall you be there in August, do you think ? *À propos*, when do you go back to England ?'

'I am not sure that I shall go back at all,' answered Barrington slowly. 'I hate London, and I don't want to go home. Why should I not stay here, and start when you do ? Perhaps I might be of some service to you on the journey.'

'Oh, how delightful that would be !' exclaimed Jeanne, half involuntarily, clasping her hands.

And then Barrington suddenly lost his head. He saw that perfect pale face bent towards him, with parted lips and soft brown eyes with a glad light in them; he saw a blue dress upon which a stray shaft of sunlight fell, and a glittering silver necklace and a pair of joined hands, and he forgot everything, except that he was alone with Jeanne, and that he loved her better than the whole world. Good-bye, caution! Good-bye, prudence and hesitation and cold common sense! He caught her hands in his, stammering in his eagerness, 'Would it be delightful? Would you think it delightful?'

She drew back with a troubled, startled look. 'What do you mean?' she murmured. 'I—I do not understand——'

'Don't you understand that, if you will only speak one word, I will never leave you again? Don't you understand——'

At this most interesting and critical juncture a tap upon the tiles and the sound of an opening door caused the speaker to break off abruptly. He wheeled round just in time to see the Duchess de Breuil make her entrance, leaning upon her stick.

Happily, the old lady's powers both of hearing and vision had become a good deal impaired of late; otherwise she could scarcely have failed to remark the agitation of the couple whose *tête-à-tête* she had so inopportunistically disturbed. As it was, she noticed nothing, and sank back into her chair with some amiable expressions of the pleasure that it gave her to find Mr. Barrington in the room. She had taken a fancy to the Englishman, whom she had discovered to be not only a fair French scholar and a man of the world, but, what was better still, a patient listener; and, as she was in a good humour that afternoon, and felt garrulously disposed, she graciously made a sign to him to take a chair by her side, and began to talk politics. She had been reading the newspapers upstairs, she said, and from what she had been able to gather, it appeared to her that a crisis was imminent in France. That poor M. Bonaparte, with his *plébiscites* and his Olliviers, his caricatures of constitutional government, his failing health, and his disreputable relations, who carried revolvers in their pockets and murdered casual visitors, was evidently near the term of his rule. 'They have begun to laugh at him already,' said the old lady, nodding her head sagaciously; 'and believe me, monsieur, when a man is laughed at in France it is time for him to pack up his trunks. You will see that before long we shall have a Red

Republic; and when that has lasted a few months, the nation will return to its allegiance, and the king will ascend the throne of his fathers at last. Ah, I am an old woman, monsieur, and I have seen many things, and I know what my compatriots are. There was a time when I myself had some influence over the course of politics; but that is long ago, and everybody has forgotten all about it now. M. de Talleyrand, who scarcely ever missed one of my Thursdays, used to say that my *salon* was the only one in Paris in which he could count upon meeting everybody whom he wanted to see. That was when we lived in the Rue Saint-Dominique, and my poor husband was Garde des Sceaux.' And so forth, and so forth.

Barrington bore it all with exemplary patience. A very small proportion of the Duchess's recollections reached his understanding; but he continued to look as if he were all attention, and, while he encouraged her to prattle on, stole occasional furtive glances at Jeanne, who was sitting a little apart, her hands loosely clasped on her lap, and a little bewilderment still visible in her face, but withal a certain soft joyousness which lent a new and wondrous charm to her beauty, and caused the heart of her wooer to beat high with happiness and hope.

He rose to go at length, and, as he bade her good-bye, held her hand a little longer than he need have done, and whispered, 'Till to-night then.'

She said nothing, but raised her eyes to his for a moment, and dropped them again. And then he knew that he had got his answer.

CHAPTER XIV.

M. DE SAINT-LUC SHOWS HIMSELF IN HIS TRUE COLOURS.

EVERYBODY knows what it is to wake gasping, trembling, shuddering out of some gruesome dream—to feel even yet the tearing claws and fangs of an imaginary tiger, or the tremendous shock of a fancied railway collision. Gradually—very gradually—the mind of the sufferer shakes itself free from the hold of the dread vision. He rolls his eyes round the familiar walls of his room, and thankfully perceives that he is still there, and not in a Newgate cell after conviction of forgery. He feels for his right leg, and discovers that those two bloodthirsty surgeons who, a

moment since, were slicing and sawing it off, existed only in a disordered imagination. He realises, with a deep sigh of relief, that he did not marry hideous old Mrs. Moneypenny yesterday morning for the sake of her wealth; nor hear of the collapse of the undertaking in which his whole fortune was involved. Nevertheless, some shadow of the grim horror will hang over him yet for an hour or two, vexing him with a vague uneasiness, and, it is to be hoped, impressing him with an increased appreciation of the virtue of abstemiousness. But if such waking sensations be unpleasant enough, how far more terrible is their converse! Calm, peaceful night steals away, bright morning comes with sunshine and stir and sound of voices, and behold! health, wealth, contentment are but rapidly evaporating visions, and it is the nightmare that is the reality! Alas! it is *true* that you are a convicted criminal—Messrs. Brown, Jones, and Robinson *did* put up their shutters yesterday morning, sure enough—What is that brown, fuzzy object on the dressing-table? Can it be an old woman's wig? Oh, horror, horror! What is done is done, and can never be obliterated *in sæcula sæculorum*.

Poor Léon de Mersac, starting out of a deep, dreamless slumber, to find himself in a strange room, and striving to recollect where he was and how he had come there, felt his heart die within him as the events of the past night slowly returned to his memory. His first impulse was to pop his head under the bedclothes, and to make a despairing effort to get back into oblivion; but he very soon found that that would not do. Who can fight against patient, inexorable fate? The silly ostrich hides its head in the sand, and falls a prey to the hunter; the little diver-duck bobs under water, time after time, to escape from the gun-barrel that is aimed at him, but gets shot in the long run; and Léon, coming up to the surface at length, with a groan, had to confront a neat little column of figures terminating in an imposing total of fr. 255,800.

A knock at the door roused him from his woebegone contemplation of this tangible evidence of calamity, and presently in stepped Saint-Luc's valet, a dapper, smooth-shaven, soft-footed little fellow, with twinkling black eyes and a perpetual smile upon his thin lips. Was M. le Marquis sufficiently reposed? he inquired in his pretty mincing Parisian French. He had been in once—twice before with coffee, but M. le Marquis was so profoundly asleep that he had not ventured to disturb him; and now it was already past ten o'clock, and M. le Vicomte had sent him to ask whether M. le Marquis would be

ready for déjeuner in an hour's time. Then, having arranged upon the toilet-table and the sofa sundry articles which he had brought with him—brushes, razors, a clean shirt, and other necessities—he requested M. le Marquis, in case he should require anything further, to give himself the trouble to touch the bell, and noiselessly withdrew.

With a heart as heavy as lead, Léon got up and dressed himself. 'I wonder Saint-Luc is not afraid to trust me with a razor,' he thought, smiling grimly as he took up that implement. He did not, however, allow his mind to dwell upon self-destruction, having finally disposed of that question overnight, but shaved himself with a tolerably steady hand; and, as soon as his toilet was completed, crossed the passage and entered his friend's sitting-room.

A pleasant rush of light and colour, and a fragrant scent of flowers and fruit, met him on the threshold. Beyond the wide-open French windows was a balcony, whose fluttering striped awning, while it shut out the full glare of the sun, did not exclude a glimpse of blue sparkling sea and snowy distant sails. On a breakfast table, prepared for two persons, were arranged vases of flowers and dishes piled up with oranges, grapes, bananas, and pomegranates; the silvered necks of two bottles of champagne protruded from their ice-pails; and there, reclining in a camp-chair, was Saint-Luc himself, gorgeous in a crimson silk dressing-jacket, and perusing, with tranquil contentment, one of a batch of newspapers just arrived from France.

The sight of all this bright cheerfulness smote the incomer with a sensation of incongruity not unmixed with injury. He had hitherto been so completely occupied with efforts to realise and meet the catastrophe that had befallen him, that he had hardly found room in his mind for any feeling of resentment against the man who had, in so unaccountable a manner, been its cause; but now he did begin to wonder, with a certain dull pain, why he should have been treated with such deliberate cruelty. 'To win a small fortune of your friend is allowable, and only the way of the world, I suppose,' reflected this unfortunate young philosopher, 'but surely it is scarcely good taste to invite him to make merry over his own ruin.'

Saint-Luc tossed away the *Figaro*, and held out his hand. 'So here you are at last, you lazy fellow,' he cried in the most light-hearted manner in the world. 'And how are you this morning?—the better for your long sleep?'

Léon, with a face as long as his arm, replied very solemnly that he was well enough.

'*Allons!* so much the better! And I hope you have a good appetite. For my part I am ravenous—nothing makes me so hungry as a sleepless night. Do you like fresh sardines and *écrevisses*? I have ordered some. I don't know what the rest of the *menu* is, but I told them to put some quails in it. One does not always dine well in this country, but, heaven be praised, one can generally count upon a very tolerable breakfast.'

'I can't say I feel much disposed to eat,' answered Léon, with a growing sense of ill-usage. 'The truth is that I am in great trouble about my losses last night; and my only reason for remaining here was that I must have a talk with you——'

'Ah, bah!' interrupted the other; 'let us leave all that till after breakfast; there is no necessity for worrying ourselves about it now. And of course you know that I am not likely to press you for payment. Besides, such luck as you had last night must change before long. Very likely another evening at *lansquenet* may leave me in your debt.'

Léon shook his head. 'I have made up my mind,' he said, 'that I will never play for money again so long as I live.'

'Really?' said Saint-Luc, looking at him curiously. 'And you imagine that you will keep that resolution?'

'I *must* do so,' answered Léon simply. 'I have sworn it.'

'Ah! Well, I think you are right. But it is a pity that men invariably take these oaths at the wrong moment. It is after winning, not after losing, that one should bid adieu to the gaming-table.'

Then the waiter came in with a tray full of good things on his shoulder; and for the next three-quarters of an hour the conversation turned upon all manner of topics save the one which must all the time have been present in the minds of both entertainer and guest. Saint-Luc did most of the talking, and did it well, exerting himself to interest and amuse his hearer, and meeting with some measure of success, though the latter felt more and more, every minute, the singular lack of sympathy shown towards him, and had to summon up a large reserve fund of pride to cover his mortification. But when black coffee and cigarettes had succeeded to dessert, Léon thought he might, without impropriety, discharge himself of his unpalatable task.

'About that money I owe you, Saint-Luc,' he began.

The Vicomte blew a cloud of smoke, and nodded to signify that he was attending.

‘I can pay you a part of it almost immediately ; for the rest I must ask you to wait a few months, or perhaps longer. I need not trouble you with details ; but when I tell you that I shall have to find a new home for Madame de Breuil and Jeanne, you will understand how painful any hurry would be to me.’

‘You don’t mean to say that you think of selling the Campagne !’ exclaimed Saint-Luc.

‘Unfortunately I have no choice.’

‘And the farm too ?’

‘A part of it, certainly. Why, what else can I do ?’ cried Léon, with some impatience. ‘Do you suppose I have 250,000 francs at the bank ?’

‘Is it really so large a sum as that ?’

‘If you will look at the different acknowledgments I handed to you last night,’ answered Léon, with suppressed exasperation, ‘you will find that I am in your debt to the amount of exactly 255,800 francs.’

Saint-Luc, in a leisurely manner, drew forth from his waistcoat-pocket a roll of crumpled papers, spread them on the table before him, and made a calculation with the aid of a pencil and pocket-book. ‘Quite right,’ he said at length. ‘That is the exact amount I took down after an original stake of ten napoleons. It certainly was a wonderful run.’

‘I suppose so.’

‘Wonderful ! I can’t at this moment call to mind having seen such another. Of course you pay me when and where you please. In the meantime, I suppose you fully understand that these slips of paper are virtually money—money paid by you to me.’

‘Undoubtedly,’ answered Léon, with a gathering frown on his brow which altogether failed to disturb his companion’s equilibrium.

‘So that to all intents and purposes I may now consider myself in possession of 255,800 francs, to do what I like with. Now there are many ways,’ continued Saint-Luc, stretching himself out comfortably in his chair, ‘of spending money won at cards. Looking back upon the rare occasions in my past life when I have netted large sums in this way, I find that my invariable custom has been to throw them out of the window, so to speak, with all possible despatch. I have never failed to repent of so doing, and have always, I believe, declared that

nothing would induce me to make such a fool of myself again. In the present instance, however, I do not intend to depart from my usual course. I propose to send your money out of the window much more quickly than I ever sent any money before; and I anticipate nothing but satisfaction from the process.'

And suiting the action to the word, Saint-Luc hastily tore up the sheaf of papers which he held, and stepping out on to the balcony, scattered the fragments to the four winds.

Then he returned, threw himself into his chair again, and burst out laughing.

'Confess, now,' he said, 'you have been thinking all this time that you were breakfasting with a card-sharper, have you not? What an opinion you must have had of me to believe that I was going to ruin you and turn your sister out of doors! Why, my dear boy, I did not want to win even so much as two hundred francs of your money. I put up that stake—why, I don't quite know—intending, if I won, to let you go on doubling till it fell into your hands. Then came those confounded even cards and their absurd rule, which put me out a good deal. I could see nothing for it but to persevere till I lost; but I was uneasy, for I saw that you had completely lost your head (you may perhaps remember that I warned you beforehand that you would do so), and it was evident to me that you would continue to play like a lunatic as long as you could get anyone to play with you. Then it occurred to me that if I could give you a sudden overwhelming shock, it would bring you to your senses, send you straight home, and make you swear never to touch a card again. The event, you see, completely justified my forecast. My only fear was that you might have enough of common sense to perceive that no gentleman could by any possibility act as I appeared to be doing. But that, it seems, was a groundless alarm. You must forgive me for having frightened you out of your wits; and some day you will, no doubt, even thank me; for I presume that a man of your simple habits considers an oath as binding, and that you have played your last game at lansquenet.'

Léon sat with his jaws agape, looking, if the truth must be told, a very considerable fool. His first sensation, on seeing those accursed papers fluttering gaily away on the summer breeze, had been one of intense relief, tempered by wonder and doubt. Then for a few moments gratitude had overpowered all other feelings. But finally, emotion becoming subdued by reason, all light and gladness faded out of his face, giving way

to the black clouds of care which they had momentarily dispersed.

'You are very kind to me, Saint-Luc,' he said slowly, at length—'at all events you have meant to be so. But unfortunately it is impossible that I should take advantage of kindness of that sort. Your having torn up a few bits of paper cannot alter the fact that I owe you 255,800 francs.'

'Bah! You never owed me anything of the sort. For my own purposes I chose to make you think that you did—*Voilà tout!*'

'I lost the money fairly, and I will pay it fairly,' answered Léon, doggedly.

'My good friend, you have paid me already. A tradesman sends you in his bill, and gives you a receipt in return for your cheque. If it pleases him to light his pipe with that cheque, what business is it of yours?'

'In such a case I should of course pay him again, and take care that he had ready-money the second time.'

'And if he threw the money into the sea?'

'Ah, that would be his affair. I, at least, should have discharged my debt. When I shall have handed you what I owe you, you will be at liberty to do what you please with your own.'

'Léon, you irritate me; and in this hot weather I am not to be irritated with impunity. Have the goodness to understand, once for all, that what took place last night was a farce from beginning to end; that I never had the most distant intention of winning your money—have none now—nor ever shall have any. In short, I will not take a single *sou* from you; and that is my last word.'

Léon shook his head.

'You forget,' said he, 'that others were playing with us, and saw me lose. What would they think if they heard that I had not paid my debt?'

'Who cares what they think?'

'You may not, but I do. I could not submit to be called a defaulter—nor indeed to be one. It is useless to argue about the matter. I have not your experience of the world, but I do know that every man who respects himself and wishes to be respected is bound by certain conventional laws, which may be absurd, but which are universally recognised. You may sacrifice your prospects, or your happiness, or even your life for a friend, but you must not give him money. And you know it as well as I do.'

'I don't know anything of the kind,' returned Saint-Luc. 'I have given money to many a friend before now—or at least lent it, which is another way of saying the same thing. But that is not the question. Will you not see, oh, you most pig-headed boy, that I never really won your money at all?'

'Ask M. de Monceaux whether you did not, and see what he will say.'

'I shall not ask him, and I don't care a rush what his answer might be if I did; but this I can tell you, if De Monceaux were in your place he would not think for a moment of paying me after hearing my explanation of my reasons for acting as I did.'

'Would he not? I am not very well acquainted with M. de Monceaux, but possibly in our family we may have a different standard of honour from his. I know my father would sooner have sold his coat than remain in any man's debt; and I also have to remember that I am a De Mersac, and must think of the reputation of my family as well as of my own.'

Léon was a little bombastic, but he was not altogether in the wrong. It began to dawn upon Saint-Luc that, with the best intentions in the world, he had done a very foolish thing. 'Never, so long as I live,' he exclaimed, 'will I attempt to save a young idiot from the consequences of his idiocy again? I sit up all night over a game of cards which I hate, with a set of men who bore me to death; I play in such a manner as to bring down upon my head the scorn and indignation of the meanest of them; and what is the result? Why, people who are not only innocent of all share in the transaction, but happen to be the very ones whom of all the world I most desire to serve, are plunged into misery, and will hate the sound of my name for ever; and the very man for whose sake I incur all this obloquy declares his intention of ruining himself ten times more completely than he would have done if I had left him alone. For heaven's sake, Léon, listen to reason, and don't drive me out of my senses.'

Léon, however, declined to be persuaded. Neither eloquence, nor patient demonstration, nor entreaty availed to shake his stubborn resolution; nor, in the midst of all his own sorrow, was he free from a certain grim satisfaction at the spectacle of his mentor's distress. 'You meant very kindly, I know,' he said more than once; 'but you have made a most unlucky mistake, and neither of us can repair it now.'

Tired out at length, Saint-Luc desisted from further words and began to search in his brain for some expedient whereby the

scruples of his debtor might be satisfied without any actual transfer of cash.

‘I think,’ he said hesitatingly, after a rather long silence—‘I think I can see one way out of the difficulty.’

‘And that is?’ said Léon, with the air of one open to conviction, but very unlikely to be convinced.

‘You said just now that a man cannot take a present of money from a friend—not that I ever proposed to make you such a present; but let that pass. One thing, however, you must admit; anybody may accept money from his nearest relations, and I think you would hardly refuse the sum in question if it were offered to you by—your sister.’

‘Quite out of the question,’ answered Léon. ‘Even supposing that I were enough of a scoundrel to rob Jeanne of her fortune. I could not do so. It is held in trust for her till her marriage.’

‘Yes; but upon her marriage I have heard—I understood,’ said Saint-Luc, a little confusedly—‘that is, Madame la Duchesse told me, one day, that it would become her absolute property.’

‘That is so certainly, but——’

‘Just allow me to finish what I was going to say. You know what my wishes have been, and are, with regard to your sister, and lately you have encouraged me to hope that, in spite of all that has passed, there might still be a chance for me. Well, supposing that I have the great good fortune to succeed, what I would propose to you is this. Let your sister, on her wedding-day, pay you 255,800 francs (a sum which is, I believe, more than covered by her dowry). You will then pass the money on to me, and all will be said and done. I don’t see what objection you can make to such an arrangement. You must remember that, in suggesting it to you, I am thinking of her comfort as much as of yours, and that if you agree to it, you will spare her and Madame de Breuil an amount of unhappiness which, in my humble opinion, you have no right to inflict upon them.’

Léon hesitated. Providence did, indeed, appear to offer to him, by this means, an honourable and easy road out of his troubles. There was something about Saint-Luc’s proposal which was not altogether agreeable to him, and yet when he thought of Jeanne and the Duchess, it seemed to him that he would hardly be justified in rejecting it. One drawback, however, there manifestly was.

‘But, Saint-Luc,’ he said, ‘if I agree to this you would lose 255,800 francs.’

‘I should lose nothing. You would pay me; and your sister—by a sort of fiction—would come to me with a diminished dower, that is all. Come, Léon, let us consider the matter settled, and say no more about it. It has given us both a great deal of needless worry as it is.’

‘Well, but then there is another thing to be considered. I can’t answer for Jeanne; she may refuse you a second time. What is to be done in that case?’

‘In that case—in that case—oh, well, we need not think about that now.’

‘But we must think about it. I am not sure that I am right in allowing you to cancel my debt at all, but I am quite certain that the thing can only be done by Jeanne’s becoming your wife. Her refusal of your offer would leave us just where we were before.’

‘Léon, you are, without any exception, the most disagreeable young man I ever encountered. I will bet you 255,800 francs to ten centimes that I marry your sister. There!’

‘I should not think of making a bet upon such a subject,’ answered the impracticable Léon.

Then Saint-Luc collected all the sofa-cushions and footstools he could lay hands on, and hurled them, one by one, at the head of his friend. A shower of crusts of bread, lumps of sugar and biscuits, followed in the same direction, and took such effect that Léon, half-laughing, half-indignant, was fain to seek shelter under the table. He bobbed up his head when the fire of projectiles had ceased, and exclaimed remonstratingly, ‘Saint-Luc, this is a serious matter.’

‘It will be for you presently, I can assure you. There only remains to me now a cut-glass sugar-basin, and at the very first word you utter having any reference to money matters, you get that basin full on the bridge of your nose. So now you are warned; and you had better go home as quick as you can. As for me, I am going out for a ride.’ And with that, Saint-Luc vanished into his bedroom, locking the door behind him.

Léon waited for a quarter of an hour, then knocked at the door, and receiving no answer, went out into the passage to see if he could effect an entrance from that side. Saint-Luc’s bedroom was occupied by a couple of housemaids, who were raising a cloud of dust from the carpet; the owner had fled.

Under the circumstances it seemed best to Léon to return to the sitting-room and write on a sheet of paper :

‘ I agree to what you propose. Only, if you fail, you will understand that I still owe you the money. You will have to wait a little longer for it ; but perhaps it is best so.’

This brief missive he folded and addressed, and then set out homewards, greatly relieved in mind, yet somewhat uneasy as to the future.

CHAPTER XV.

THE BEGINNING OF TROUBLE.

As Mr. Barrington was leaving the Campagne de Mersac by one door, after bidding adieu to his hostess in the manner already described, M. de Fontvieille was entering it through another. This was a very fortunate circumstance for Jeanne, since it gave her, ere long, an opportunity of slipping quietly out of the room and seeking that solitude which just then was her chief desire. M. de Fontvieille had brought with him a copy of Rochefort's new paper, the *Marseillaise*, and the two old folks were soon so fully occupied in perusing the elegant personalities of that gentlemanly print that they scarcely noticed Jeanne's exit.

She strolled away through the orchard at the back of the house, and thence through orange and lemon groves, where starry blossoms mingled with the ripe golden fruit, till she came to a low boundary wall, beyond which stretched waving corn-fields, ending in a waste of palmetto-shrub and barren upland ; and there, perched upon a broad, flat stone, with her back against the trunk of a thick-leaved carob-tree, gave her-elf up to the unrestrained enjoyment of her newly-found happiness. Until that moment she had never said to herself in so many words that she loved Barrington ; yet it had been so for some time past ; and now that he had given her a right to interrogate her heart without shame, it seemed to her that she had loved him, and he her, from the first day of their meeting, and that his interrupted avowal was but the formal acknowledgment of a fact long since recognized by both of them. The difficulties which would have to be conquered before she could become Barrington's wife did not, at this moment, cause her any

anxiety, though, if she had given the subject a thought, she must have perceived that these were likely to be formidable enough. The strenuous opposition of M. de Fontvieille and the Duchess; banishment from Algeria and from Léon; the serious disadvantages attendant upon the marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant—these were some among the obstacles which she must ere long face, and, if possible, surmount; but, in this first glow of joy, she was able to keep such considerations out of sight, and dwell only on the one triumphant thought that she was loved. ‘He loves me! he loves me!’ she murmured to herself again and again—‘and I—oh, how I love him!’

The loitering summer wind caught up this precious secret, whispered it to the swaying branches, which answered with a sigh, and bore it away seawards towards the town, where Barrington was even now sitting, with a half-pleased, half-puzzled face, saying to himself, ‘So I have done it at last—that is, pretty nearly done it. I shall meet her at the ball to-night, and then it will be all over. I think I am glad—I am sure I am glad—of course I am glad—I could not live without her—and yet—’ Barrington had been in love, and out of love again, many, many times, whereas Jeanne’s heart had remained untouched by any suitor till this Englishman had come and captured it almost without an effort. The one absorbing passion of her life had been her devotion to her brother. Since her father’s death she had given herself up so completely to him that there had been no more room left in her nature for any warmer affection than a moderate liking for the rest of the world. And now, was his place to be taken by a stranger? This question was forced upon her rather abruptly by the sudden appearance of Léon at her elbow; and it was perhaps a twinge of self-reproach that made her embrace him more affectionately than usual, as she exclaimed—

‘Léon, how you startled me! Did you rise from the earth or fall from the clouds?’

‘No, but one’s feet get so swollen this hot weather that I put on my *spadrilles*,’ replied that matter-of-fact young man, exhibiting a pair of canvas shoes. ‘I saw you a quarter of a mile off. What are you doing here all by yourself?’

‘Nothing,’ answered Jeanne, blushing a little. ‘I am so glad you have come back. I thought you must have gone to the fair at Bouffarik.’

Léon sighed. ‘I wish I had!’ he muttered involuntarily.

'Why?' asked Jeanne, turning upon him with a quick look of apprehension. 'Has anything happened? Where were you yesterday? At Madame de Trémonville's?'

'Why on earth should I have been at Madame de Trémonville's?' returned Léon, with a petulant gesture. 'And what harm could have happened to me if I had been there! I believe, Jeanne, you would like me never to speak to any woman except yourself, Madame de Vaublanc, and the Duchess. I have lost a chance of selling some beasts by not being at Bouffarik—that is all. If you want to know where I was last night, I was in Algiers, dining with Saint-Luc, who has just returned from Kabylia.'

'Already?'

'Yes; there was nothing to keep him there after we had left, you know.'

Then there was a pause, after which Jeanne remarked, musingly, 'I am sorry I have spoken so often against M. de Saint-Luc to you, Léon; I have liked him much better lately than I used to do, and I mean to be good friends with him for the future.'

Léon had a vague impression that, under the circumstances, it would be scarcely honourable in him to say much to his sister in Saint-Luc's praise, but he did feel himself at liberty to observe—

'I think you are sometimes a little apt to be prejudiced, *ma sœur*. There is Madame de Trémonville, for instance, a really charming person, whom I am convinced you would like, if you knew her better.'

'Oh, never mind her,' interrupted Jeanne, with sudden asperity. 'She will do very well without my liking; and it is most improbable that I shall ever be better acquainted with her than I am. But I confess I was in the wrong about M. de Saint-Luc.'

This was very satisfactory. Léon began to think that all would yet go well; that he would soon have the pleasure of welcoming Saint-Luc as his brother-in-law; that his debt would be wiped out, and that the only abiding result of last night's folly would be a fine crop of good resolutions. But all these fair hopes were annihilated by Jeanne's next words.

'To speak plainly, Léon,' she went on, 'I should not have disliked M. de Saint-Luc so much if I had not known all along that he was intended to marry me. And then what annoyed me was that, instead of coming forward in a business-like way,

as all the Duchess's other protégés have done, stating his advantages and what he required in return for them, offering his hand, and being politely sent about his business, he would hang on and hang on, making me obnoxious presents and following me about whenever I entered a ball-room, and yet never giving me the opportunity of telling him what is the truth—that I would no more think of marrying him than—than old Pierre Cauvin.'

At this forcible announcement Léon's countenance assumed an aspect of the most profound dejection ; but Jeanne, who was looking down at the ground and tracing patterns with the point of her shoe, continued, without observing him—

'Now all that is at an end. Do you remember that night at Fort Napoléon, when he and I walked away together after dinner ? Well, he asked me then, and I told him it was quite impossible. But I was very sorry ; for it seemed that, after all, he had not been thinking only of making a good, suitable match, as I had supposed, but that he really did care for me for myself.'

'He most certainly did, and he does still,' broke in Léon, eagerly.

'Has he spoken to you of it ?' asked Jeanne, looking up. 'It is a great pity ; I quite believed he was sincere ; but what could I do ?'

'Do you think you are wise to reject Saint-Luc, Jeanne ?' Léon asked, after communing for a short space with himself, and deciding that he might permissibly plead his friend's cause to this limited extent. 'I would not urge you to act in any way against your inclinations, but it seems to me that you start by setting your face against every man who might become your husband ; and yet some day or other you will require a house and an establishment of your own. I don't know where you could find a better or kinder fellow than Saint-Luc. He is devoted to you ; he would do everything he could to make you happy—'

'Yes, yes, I know all that,' interrupted Jeanne a little impatiently, for she was not accustomed to being lectured by her younger brother. 'I don't doubt that M. de Saint-Luc is all that you say ; but when I marry, if I ever do marry, it will not be for the sake of a house and an establishment.'

'Not for that alone, of course.'

'Not for that in any degree. Let us say no more about it.'

'You will not even give Saint-Luc another trial then?'

'Another trial!' echoed Jeanne, with a little vexed laugh. 'You talk of him as if he were a horse. How am I to try him, and what difference could a hundred trials make? If you will insist on having everything put before you in such plain language, Léon, I do not love M. de Saint-Luc, and shall never do so, though I may come to like him very much indeed. Pray do not let him think for a moment that it can be otherwise. If you were to do so, you would be acting very unkindly both to him and to me.'

She was half-inclined to give her brother some hint that her heart was no longer her own to dispose of; but this she could hardly do as yet, not being formally engaged to Mr. Barrington.

'You mean me to understand then that your marriage with Saint-Luc is an impossibility?'

'It is as much an impossibility as anything in this world can be,' answered Jeanne, emphatically.

'So be it!' said Léon, rising, with a deep sigh, from the stone on which he had been seated. 'It is very unfortunate, but it can't be helped.'

'But why should it be unfortunate?' asked Jeanne, glancing up at her brother with some curiosity. 'What reason can you have for wishing so much that I should marry a man whom I do not love?'

'What reason? Ah, that I cannot tell you. And yet,' he added, with a sudden desperate resolution to confess the worst, and get it over, 'why should I not tell you? You must be told soon—the sooner the better, perhaps. Jeanne, I am going to make you hate me—no, not hate me—that I know you will never do. I daresay you will not even be very angry with me, though heaven knows I deserve your anger.'

Jeanne got up and seated herself beside her brother. She threw her arm round his neck and bent down her beautiful head till her cheek rested against his.

'Tell me all about it, Léon,' she whispered. 'You used always to come to me in your troubles, you know.'

'Yes, always,' he answered with something between a sob and a sigh. 'Do you remember, long ago, when we were children, M. de Fontvieille saying, one day, that you ought to have been the boy and I the girl? I was very angry with him at the time, but I have often thought since that he was right. Oh, Jeanne, I have made such a fool of myself.'

‘Never mind, dear,’ she said, stroking his close-cropped black hair. ‘Whatever you have done, nothing can come between us two, or change our love for each other.’

‘No; that is the worst of it. If you would abuse me roundly I might be able to plead some extenuating circumstances for myself; but as it is, what can I do, except tell you the bare facts? It is absurd to apologise and say, “I am sorry”—there are injuries too deep to be atoned for by any apology, and it is a wrong of that kind that I have done to you.’ And then, without further preface, Léon gave a brief account of his adventure at the club and his subsequent interview with Saint-Luc. Jeanne heard him with the most unruffled composure, only interrupting his recital by an occasional expression of sympathy, till he explained the means by which he had hoped that the impending catastrophe might be averted. Upon that, much to the consternation of Léon, who imagined that he had got through the worst part of his confession, she withdrew her arm from his shoulder with a quick movement of repulsion, and starting to her feet, moved away a few paces. Her back was towards him, so that he could not at first see what an unexpected effect his announcement had had upon her; but when she turned round presently and looked at him, he involuntarily shrank back, for her face bore an expression of mingled scorn, pain, and humiliation such as he had never seen there before, and which, having once seen, he never afterwards forgot.

‘So *I* was the stake for which you and M. de Saint-Luc played a game of cards,’ she said at length, in a low, hard voice. ‘I think you are right, Léon—you ought not to have been born a man.’

‘Oh, Jeanne!’ he exclaimed, wincing under these cruel words, ‘what do you mean? What have I done?’

‘Done? Only allowed a stranger to think that he might take your sister in payment of a gambling debt. Is it possible that you do not see what must have been the man’s object all through? Of course he knew that you would pay him, and that I would rather sacrifice myself than ruin you. I will try to forgive you, Léon, but him I will never forgive to my dying day.’

‘Jeanne, you are quite wrong. You mistake altogether. I can answer for it that Saint-Luc was as innocent of any such notion as I was myself. It was quite understood between us that my debt to him was to remain the same in the event of your refusing him, and I told him that you would very likely

do so. Don't think me worse than I am. I swear to you that it was for your sake, not my own, that I consented to Saint-Luc's proposition. How could I bear the thought of driving you out of your home by my folly ?'

'I would do much more than give up a few luxuries for you, Léon ; and you must know it. It is not that—not that.'

And here, to Léon's utter amazement, Jeanne suddenly covered her face with her hands, and burst into a storm of tears.

Such displays of emotion were so rare with the calm, self-possessed Mademoiselle de Mersac that her brother was as much shocked and startled by the present outbreak as if she had been a man. Not in the least understanding why she should have been so violently moved, he felt, nevertheless, that he had unintentionally wounded her far more deeply than he had expected to do, and, like a true Frenchman, he became at once infected by the sight of her distress till he was scarcely less agitated than she. He flung himself down on the ground beside her, calling her by every endearing epithet that he could think of, cursing his own stupidity and awkwardness, and beseeching for forgiveness so piteously that it would have required a much harder heart than Jeanne's to withstand his entreaties.

She grew calmer by degrees, and held out her hand to him, as she dried her eyes.

'I think I will go in now,' she said, 'I cannot talk any more just at the present ; but of one thing you may be sure, Léon—M. de Saint-Luc shall have his money, and it will not be necessary for you to give up the house or the farm.'

Then she got up, and disregarding her brother's efforts to detain her, passed quickly away between the smooth trunks of the orange-trees, and was soon out of sight.

Her head was aching and throbbing when she reached the solitude of her own room and sat down to think ; but she had all her wits about her—as indeed she always had—and the situation in which she was placed was as clear to her as daylight. Of course M. de Saint-Luc must be paid. Equally, of course, he must be paid out of her marriage-portion, since that was the only sum of ready money which the family could raise without grievous loss, scandal, and humiliation. If, then, Barington were to become her husband, it would be necessary that she should ask him to resign all claim upon the greater part of her fortune, and the prospect of having to make this request was a sore wound to her pride. To ask a favour, even of the

man whom she loved best in the world, would be disagreeable to her ; to ask for money would be more disagreeable still ; to make her acceptance of his hand dependent upon his reply would be most disagreeable of all. The thing, however, had to be done ; and Jeanne, who had never yet lacked courage in any emergency, made up her mind that she could do it without flinching. That Barrington would meet her with a refusal did not seem likely. She believed him to be a rich man ; but even were he not so, his love, if it were worth having at all, must needs rise superior to mercenary considerations. Knowing that she herself would have laughed at the idea of any question of money creating a breach between them, she could scarcely imagine that he would show himself less magnanimous. But supposing that, by any chance, his masculine common sense or English phlegm should revolt against the frittering away of his wife's fortune to fill the pockets of a gamester, what alternative would then remain ? This possibility also Jeanne forced herself to contemplate calmly, and arose from the consideration of it with something of a shudder indeed, but with no hesitation in her mind. Sooner than that the name of De Mersac should be disgraced and Léon's future career blighted, she would pay in her own person the losses he had so carelessly incurred, and become Saint-Luc's wife. Many another woman had gone knowingly to as hard a fate with a less noble aim in view, and had lived through it, and earned some sort of contentment, if not happiness. 'And happiness is not everything,' thought poor Jeanne.

The absurdity of sacrificing her whole life for a mere mistake did not strike her. To her, not less than to Léon, it would have seemed in the highest degree dishonourable to accept a gift of money or release from a debt, however contracted ; and thus, at this turning point of her earthly course, she stood alone and unwavering, bright hopes on one side and utter darkness on the other, and all her future resting upon the will of a good-natured, romantic, selfish fellow, whose yes or no might be affected by his breakfast or the state of the weather, or any other trivial external influence.

Of this Jeanne was not aware ; but she felt that so momentous an issue could not fitly be decided in a ball-room, so she sat down and wrote a few lines to Madame de Vaublanc, saying that she did not feel well enough to go to the Palace that night. Barrington would undoubtedly call the next morning to inquire after her, and then her fate could be decided at once and for ever.

CHAPTER XVI.

MADAME DE VAUBLANC STIRS UP EVIL PASSIONS.

‘THE question is,’ mused Barrington, ‘whether a man who isn’t a soldier doesn’t look more or less of a fool in soldier’s clothes ? But then, again, what is the use of dragging a Yeomanry uniform about the world if one is not to wear it ? And Frenchmen always think it rather odd if one appears in plain evening dress on a gala occasion. I suppose I had better put the thing on.’

The subject of these hesitating reflections was a very smart blue tunic, loaded with a profusion of silver lace, which lay outstretched on Barrington’s bed beside a pair of trousers with a broad silver stripe, a sword, and a white-plumed helmet.

‘It is tight, it is uncomfortable, and I am not sure that it isn’t a little bit ridiculous ; but it don’t do to seem wanting in respect, and that sort of thing. I hope the Governor-General will take my appearance in it as a compliment,’ concluded Barrington, who in truth loved bright colours and showy apparel, and never by any chance missed the Yeomanry ball which closed his short annual period of training. And so he struggled into his nether garments with a sigh of mingled resignation and contentment.

A few doors off, M. de Saint-Luc, who had worn a gay jacket long enough to have grown tired of it, was arraying himself in the plainest of plain clothes, in preparation for the same festivity as that to which Barrington had been bidden. Not without sundry misgivings had he decided to present himself at the ball ; for he was by no means sure what Jeanne would think of his reappearance in society so soon after the shattering of all his hopes, nor could he feel any certainty with regard to the footing upon which he would now stand with her, or as to whether he might venture to ask her for a dance or not. Yet, since they must meet before long, what signified time and place ? The first encounter might be a little awkward, but it would soon be over ; and as to his future line of conduct, that must be regulated in a great measure by hers. He did not delude himself into the belief that success could be won by any other means than time and much patience ; and, as he had a limitless supply of both these necessities at command, it seemed best to take the earliest opportunity of drawing upon

them. He had completed his toilet long before Barrington had done studying the effect of his full-length figure before his pier-glass, and, calling a passing *fiacre*, presently joined the stream of vehicles which was wending its slow way up the hill of Mustapha Supérieur, where the summer palace stands.

The majority of the company had already arrived when Saint-Luc made his entrance, and it was with some little difficulty that he threaded his way through the crowded approaches to the ball-room, where the orchestra was in full swing, and where toilettes Parisian and Algerian, mingled with uniforms of every conceivable cut and hue, produced a bewildering shifting effect of colour and glitter which, taken as a spectacle, might, to a less preoccupied man, have seemed worth gazing at for a few minutes. But Saint-Luc had seen it all before, and was not in the mood for studying *tableaux vivants*. The generals and admirals; the Spahis in their scarlet, and the Chasseurs d'Afrique in their pale blue, jackets; the préfets and sous-préfets in their green and gold coats, the portly mayors, whose gold embroidery, not content with covering their breasts, overflowed, and meandered agreeably down their broad backs; the violet robes of a stray ecclesiastic or two; the white burnous of some Arab chief, against which the cross and red ribbon of the Legion of Honour showed somewhat incongruously; the swarthy Moors and black-eyed, bediamonded Jewesses—all these were objects with which he had long been familiar and it was neither to look at them nor to admire the graceful Oriental architecture of the palace and the beauty of the illuminated gardens that he had forsaken his nocturnal cigar and the quietude of his own chamber. But she whom he had come out to see was nowhere to be discovered; and, instead of greeting her, he found himself ere long compelled to shake hands with a lady whom he would gladly have avoided.

Madame de Trémonville was not one of those persons who can be avoided without their own good will and pleasure. She was far too well satisfied with herself to suppose that any man could really wish to escape from her, and interpreted Saint-Luc's rather distant bow and abstracted gaze as a mere indication of that boredom which was, in her eyes, one of the chief evidences of his superiority to the common herd.

'You do not amuse yourself too well, M. le Vicomte,' said she, pausing beside him, and dismissing her attendant cavalier with an unceremonious nod. '*Ma foi!* I am not surprised. From Paris to Algiers—from the Tuileries to Mustapha—what

a change! Were you ever in such a crowd of droll people before? What faces! what manners! what clothes!’

And Madame de Trémonville disdainfully shrugged her plump shoulders, which were thickly coated with *blanc de perles*, and heaved a piteous sigh.

‘Madame, you are too severe upon the company,’ answered Saint-Luc, pulling himself together. ‘I have been but a few minutes in the room, and already I see one face and one toilette which could not be surpassed either in Paris or elsewhere.’

‘Oh, monsieur!’

‘Beauty and good taste always find imitators. With such an example before them, these ladies will assuredly learn soon to reform any little errors in their dress or conduct,’ pursued Saint-Luc. (‘How shall I get rid of this detestable woman!’) ‘But it is a sin to expose your exquisite lace flounce to the risk of being torn in such a crowd. Will you not allow me to find you a seat?’

‘Let them tear it—so much the better if they do,’ answered Madame de Trémonville, passing by the hint. ‘I have worn it half-a-dozen times already, and I am tired of the sight of it. There is the music beginning again; shall we dance? Quick! I see my partner coming for me.’

Saint-Luc, who always accepted the inevitable with a good grace, passed his arm round the waist of his fascinating companion, and floated away with her into the whirling throng of dancers, while the young officer whom he had supplanted looked after the couple with mingled sorrow and reproach.

‘What a strange world it is, and how little any of us know of our fellow-creatures!’ thought the philosophical Vicomte, with an inward laugh. ‘That young fellow, who would quarrel with any of his brother-officers for robbing him of a partner, does not dream of interfering with a man of my prestige. Such a career as mine has been fills him with admiration and respect. I suppose he thinks he would be perfectly happy if he could change places with me, and be looked upon as a hero by a few fools, and flirt with this painted, vulgar woman, who has already managed to get into the society of her betters, and is miserable because she will never reach a still higher circle. I daresay there are even people who envy Madame de Trémonville too. Is there such a thing as contentment, I wonder? and does everybody wish for something he has not got, and hate it as soon as he gets it? Is it because what I long for would make me so supremely happy that I feel such a certainty of failure?’

Saint-Luc had time to debate all these questions, and sundry others, while he was mechanically piloting Madame de Trémonville in and out among the erratic couples who revolved around him. He had just arrived at the sage conclusion that the happiest of mortals is the man who has ceased to seek for happiness, when his meditations and his career were alike cut short by the apparition in the doorway of a cap whose violet bows could only belong to Madame de Vaublanc.

‘She is coming!’ thought Saint-Luc, forgetting all his philosophy; and he brought his partner to a sudden standstill.

Madame de Vaublanc indeed it was; but where, alas! was the tall graceful figure and the pale, proud face that should have followed her? Saint-Luc, peering anxiously out into the corridor, could discover no familiar countenance save the puzzled and angry one of Mr. Barrington, frowning above the silver lace of the Royal Surrey Yeomanry Cavalry. ‘I am not the only one who is disappointed to-night,’ thought he, with a smile and a sigh, as he turned to greet Madame de Vaublanc, who clutched his hand as a drowning man seizes a rope.

‘*Mon Dieu*, monsieur!’ she exclaimed, ‘how glad I am to see you! What a terrible crush, is it not?—and not a person here whom I know—and I who have crowds in horror! Is there a possibility, do you think, of my finding a chair anywhere?’

Madame de Trémonville pounced upon the bewildered old lady before Saint-Luc could reply, and saluted her with a *feu-de-joie* of shrill ejaculations.

‘What, dear madame! You at a ball, and alone too! But where is your charming *protégée*? What have you done with Mademoiselle Jeanne? I have been looking for her arrival, that I might present to her some most agreeable young men who are dying to make her acquaintance—M. de Monceaux, M. d’Arville—’

‘Mademoiselle de Mersac is not with me,’ interrupted the old lady, sourly; ‘and if she were, I should not think it my duty to allow her to dance with the first that came.’

‘Oh, madame! you know that I am discretion itself. My friends are all persons of the highest respectability. If they were not alive at the accession of Louis XVIII. that is neither my fault nor theirs. But I trust Mademoiselle Jeanne will join us before the evening is over.’

‘She is not coming at all,’ answered Madame de Vaublanc, too full of her grievance to refrain from speaking of it, even to

the enemy. 'She wrote to me at the last moment to say she had the *migraine*. It is very inconsiderate—very inconvenient, I mean. Having accepted the Maréchale's invitation, I felt bound to come here, much as I dislike such entertainments. Indeed, it is only out of politeness that I sometimes attend even the small Monday receptions, though there, of course, I am more among my friends.'

At this moment a young aide-de-camp, whose pinched-in waist and voluminous trousers gave his figure somewhat the appearance of a brightly-coloured hour-glass, shouldered his way towards the little group. He was an acquaintance of Madame de Trémonville's, who put on one of her most telling smiles to receive him; but he passed her with a bow, and bent down to offer his arm to Madame de Vaublanc.

'Madame la Maréchale sends me to say that she has a seat for you beside her, madame,' said he. 'Will you permit me?'

So the violet cap-ribbons went bobbing and nodding away through the crowd beside the blue jacket, and presently Madame de Trémonville had the satisfaction of making out her old friend, seated at the far end of the room, among a circle of magnates whom, bold as she was, she dared not approach. The lady who at that time exercised vice-regal sway over the society of Algeria was generally thought to have leanings towards Legitimists, and was notoriously averse to fast women of the type of Madame de Trémonville. The latter had never been able to obtain an invitation to those Mondays of which Madame de Vaublanc had spoken, and this was a very sore point with her.

'Of all the people I have ever met, I think that old woman is the ugliest, the most ill-natured, and the most ill-bred,' she cried, with a fine hearty emphasis and unaffected warmth which made Saint-Luc laugh a little.

'Poor old soul!' said he. 'She resembles a walnut in character as well as in the appearance of her skin. If you want to get at the good in her, you must break through a hard outer shell of obstinacy and prejudice, beneath which lies a not very thick covering of bitterness against the human race, which has not treated her over well; but the good qualities are there, and not so hard to discover after all.'

'Bah! everybody has good qualities,' returned Madame de Trémonville, impatiently. 'I may say, without vanity, that I also have good qualities. We all know that that frightful old Vaublanc and the Duchesse de Breuil and Mademoiselle de

Mersac give money to the poor and visit the sick occasionally ; but that is not what society requires of them. If they say their prayers regularly and keep all the ten commandments, so much the better for them—that is their affair. Society does not concern itself with such things, but simply asks that they should show some signs of *savoir-vivre* and good breeding, and that is precisely what none of them does.’

‘Pardon me, madame, but I must differ from you entirely, so far as Mademoiselle de Mersac and the Duchess are concerned. I never met two ladies of more perfectly refined and amiable manners. As for Madame de Vaublanc, she is a little brusque ; but I find that, as I grow older, I value people more for what they are than for what they seem to be, and——’

‘Enough ! enough !’ cried Madame de Trémonville, throwing up her hands with a gesture of simulated terror. ‘One does not go to a ball to hear a sermon. Go away, M. le Vicomte ; you weary me.’

‘I must obey your commands, madame, however cruel,’ replied Saint-Luc, with suspicious alacrity.

‘Stop ! Before you go, take me to that M. Barainton. I want to ask him what is that fine uniform he wears. I did not know he was a *militaire*,’ said Madame de Trémonville, whose tastes in more respects than one were identical with those of the Grande Duchesse de Gêrolstein.

People who have the harmless mania of ferreting out the original sources of great events are fond of proving, or seeming to prove, that the course of the world’s history has been affected over and over again by some paltry occurrence to which no one paid any attention at the time, nor recollected until long afterwards. A fit of indigestion, they tell us, costs thousands of lives ; an apple falling from a tree leads to a scientific discovery of incalculable importance ; an angry word decides the fate of an empire. As regards such important matters, the chain of reasoning is, perhaps, more curious than valuable, and serves, at most, only to show how the inevitable may be hastened or delayed by trifles ; yet there can be but few men who, looking back upon their past lives, will deny that their personal history has been fashioned less by what they have done than by what has happened to them. Wise and foolish, strong and weak, must yield alike to the influence of trivialities, in which some see the hand of Providence, some the blind, uncontrollable working of an infinitely complicated machine, and some mere accident. If Madame la Maréchale had not, out of pure good nature, sent an

aide-de-camp to look after an unattractive old woman ; if Saint-Luc had not happened to annoy his volatile partner ; if Barrington's silver lace had been a little less conspicuous, Madame de Trémonville would never have worked the mischief that she did that night, and the course of more than one life would have taken a different direction.

She was not an ill-natured person, this quick-witted underbred little Frenchwoman. She did not want to injure or afflict anybody, and was no more capable of hatred than she was of love. Her vulnerable point was her vanity, and if that were touched she would show spite and temper for a time, as a cat arches her back and spits when a big dog stalks past her without turning his head. Because she had been ignored and Madame de Vaublanc honoured, she felt it a necessity to say some sharp things of that lady and her clan ; and since Saint-Luc did not seem disposed to swallow her little dose of calumny, she thought she would administer it to Mr. Barrington, whom she knew to be also a constant visitor at the Campagne de Mersac.

Long afterwards, when he recalled that evening, and Madame de Trémonville's envious disparagement of one whom he knew to be immeasurably her superior, Barrington used to wonder how he could have allowed such vain babbling to produce even a passing impression upon his mind. Earlier in the day he would, perhaps, hardly have attended to it ; but at that moment he was annoyed and perplexed by Jeanne's failure to keep her appointment, and the misgivings which he had only half stifled in the morning had begun to return upon him. The mind, as well as the body, has seasons at which it is more liable to receive poison than at others, and, having received it, is less able to shake it off.

After all, it was nothing very terrible that Madame de Trémonville said. They were standing, she and her partner, on a broad verandah, whither they had escaped from the heated air of the ball-room. Before them stretched the garden with its trim lawns, its flower-beds, its trees and shrubs, its coloured lamps, its expanses of light and dark patches of shadow. Barrington, leaning against a marble pillar, and looking out upon the soft beauty of the night, was listening, not very attentively, to his companion's rapid chatter. She had been denouncing and ridiculing the Duchesse de Breuil and Madame de Vaublanc. She had mimicked, rather cleverly, the high and mighty manner of the one, and the harsh, rasping voice of the other.

‘A pair of old ogresses, who fancy themselves princesses; nobody is cruel enough to disabuse them of their error,’ she said. Barrington listened to it all, not without amusement. He thought the two ogresses were very well able to stand up for themselves—as indeed they were—and did not feel called upon to undertake their defence. Now it was Jeanne’s turn.

‘Tell me, monsieur,’ cried the little lady, resting her rounded arms upon the marble balustrade, and fluttering her fan as she looked up in the Englishman’s face, ‘you who are so well acquainted with her—do you find her very attractive?’

Barrington had found her very decidedly so; but he replied in a tone of judicial impartiality, ‘Well, yes; he should say that Mademoiselle de Mersac was certainly an attractive person.’

‘Really? But gentlemen and ladies so seldom agree on these points. The truth is, that one woman is always a fairer judge of another than any man can be.’

Barrington observed that the world at large had long ago arrived at a diametrically opposite conclusion.

‘I know that; but the world is mistaken, as it very often is. The world starts by assuming that all women are jealous of one another—which is absurd. It is easy enough for a woman to please men; beauty alone will do that, not to speak of a hundred other weapons which she learns to use before she is out of the nursery. But if she wishes to be loved by other women, she must have a heart. Jeanne de Mersac has no heart. She is as cold as a stone; she has no real affection for anybody; and that is why I, for one, am repelled by her.’

‘You will allow, at least, that she has some affection for her brother?’ said Barrington.

‘Affection? I do not know. She is kind to him, and does a great deal for him; but that explains itself. *Tenez*, M. Barrington, I will give you the key to Jeanne de Mersac’s character in three words—love of power. She has one of those natures—happily not very common among young girls—which can be magnanimous, generous, amiable even, to subordinates, but which revolt against all authority. Have you remarked her passion for animals? It is easily understood; they do not question her orders. She devotes herself to her brother—why? Because he does nothing without consulting her. When he begins to act for himself, she will abandon him, and seek for some other slave. Madame de Breuil, who is completely under her thumb, she tolerates, but does not like; because, after all,

the most easy-going of chaperons must occasionally lay some restrictions upon her charge. In short, this girl, who might have made herself talked of if she had been born to a throne, will never be anything but an insupportable wife; and, for my part, if I were M. de Saint-Luc, I would not marry her, though she had twice her beauty and ten times her fortune.

‘Possibly she may decline to marry M. de Saint-Luc,’ said Barrington.

‘For his sake, I hope with all my heart that she may. Her husband will have two alternatives open to him. Either he will have to submit to her at once and unreservedly, to allow her to control everything, not excepting his expenditure—in which case she will doubtless manage his affairs well, and treat him with every consideration—or he will have to fight a long battle, out of which he can only come victorious at the cost of his happiness. No man is very likely to adopt the former course, and it is not every one who will succeed in the latter. All things considered, I do not envy Mademoiselle Jeanne’s future husband,’ concluded Madame de Trémonville, as she turned to re-enter the ball-room.

Barrington donned his helmet and his martial cloak, and went clanking down the hill, pensive and vaguely uneasy. The broad high road before him was barred by black shadows from the acacia trees that bordered it; and, as he walked, it seemed to him that he was looking forward into his own future path in life, and could see some such patches of gloom lying across it. ‘Love of power her only passion’—‘She will never be anything but an insupportable wife’—‘She is as cold as a stone’—what were all these accusations but the reflections of his own forebodings magnified, perhaps a little distorted, by an angry woman? Or was it only that they were rendered more distinct? Well, if it were so, that did not make them more real. It is oblique lights—half lights—that fling shadows, and seem to convert them into tangible realities. When the sun is high overhead, and all dark nooks and corners are illuminated, they vanish away. But then common-sense stepped in, and pointed out that similes were not facts, and that after making every allowance for the exaggerations of a hostile critic, there still remained some basis of truth to support her assertions. Jeanne was, undoubtedly, fond of her own way, and accustomed to get it. She had a certain royal fashion of issuing her commands to those about her without assigning reasons for them; she was far more disposed to unbend in the presence of her

inferiors than in that of her equals, and towards the latter her bearing was almost invariably cold and indifferent. Barrington had long since remarked these traits in her character, and had been attracted by them. Had she been more like the rest of the world, he would hardly have fallen in love with her. But then, is originality a desirable quality in a wife? The whole question lay there. Would not the very incentives which had called his passion into existence contribute more strongly than anything towards its extinction 'in the knot there's no untying'? All experience seemed to answer Yes. If only the present state of affairs could be indefinitely prolonged, and the question of marriage adjourned *sine die*! thought Barrington, as he toiled wearily upstairs to his bedroom, a prey to doubts and fears with which, it is to be hoped, that no one will feel any sympathy.

The French mail had come in late that evening, and a pile of letters lay on his table awaiting perusal.

'Ernest Seymour's fist,' muttered Barrington, as he took up one of them, and sank into an armchair. 'I wonder what he has got to complain about now; he never writes unless he has some grievance. Amelia ill again, I suppose.'

'110 Portland Place: June 5.

'MY DEAR HARRY,

'The anxiety and distress which, during the last three days, have almost overwhelmed me must be my excuse for not having written to you before this. I am positive that I several times gave directions to have a telegram sent to Broadridge, but it seems that, through the negligence of the servants, this was not done; and now, to my great surprise, I have just learnt from your Aunt Susan that you have not yet returned from Algeria.

'I have not ventured as yet to communicate this news to dear Amelia, who is constantly asking for you, and I shall try, if possible, to tranquillise her with assurances of your speedy arrival. In her present exhausted state she does not, I think, take much note of the passage of time. Were I to let her know how many days must necessarily elapse before we can hope to have you with us, the shock would, I am convinced, have a most deleterious effect upon her.

'Alas, poor dear! she has had one of her most alarming attacks. For twenty-four hours she was almost entirely unconscious; and, though she has now to some extent rallied, it is impossible to describe her state otherwise than as one of

extreme peril. Her emaciation is frightful, and, as for nourishment, I may say that for days past she has taken literally none. Even the Liebig, which you may remember that we have found so useful hitherto, she has been unable to retain; and though the light farinaceous food ordered by the doctor has, up to the present time, been kept upon her stomach, who can say how long it may remain there? But I must not afflict you with these painful details.

‘Sir William Puffin, whom we called in some days ago, seems to hesitate about giving any decided opinion upon the case, but tells me he does not apprehend any *immediate* danger. Dear Amelia herself, however, has little expectation of ever leaving her bed again.

‘Your Aunt Susan tries to cheer us up in her well-intentioned but rather rough way, and says the whole thing is nothing but hysteria, and will go away as suddenly as it came. She is opposed to my recalling you to England; but I am sure that you will feel, with me, that I am right in doing so. How difficult it seems to be, to thoroughly robust people, to sympathise with those who are in constant ill health! To hear your Aunt Susan talk, you would imagine that Amelia and I were to *blame* for being the wretched invalids that we are!

‘I myself am very far from well; and Puffin being in the house, I thought it only prudent to consult him. But I doubt whether, in the very short interview he thought fit to grant me, he can have properly grasped the significance of my symptoms. He says I am dyspeptic, and that may be so; but dyspepsia cannot possibly account for all the strange sensations that I have experienced of late. A continual and most distressing singing in the ears, sudden and unaccountable pains in the back and limbs, palpitation of the heart, giddiness, distaste for food, drowsiness, and sad depression of spirits are only a few of these. Should my life be spared until the summer, I propose, with Sir William’s permission, to give a trial to the cold water cure at Malvern. What the effect of that drastic treatment will be upon so enfeebled a frame as mine time alone can show; but I am willing to run the risk, and am, I hope, justified in so doing.’

The same interesting subject was pursued through two more closely-written pages, which Barrington dismissed with a hasty glance, and then threw the letter aside. The Amelia, whose sufferings were so touchingly depicted therein, was his only sister, Mrs. Seymour, who, having been delicate, nervous, and

fanciful all her life, had developed into a confirmed invalid, after linking her fortunes with those of a valetudinarian husband. This was neither the first, nor the second, nor the third time that Barrington had been summoned, in all haste, to attend her death-bed, and had arrived to find her on the sofa, and not much worse than usual. She was always dying, but, somehow or other, never died. At the same time it was undeniable that so fragile a creature might die upon small provocation; and though Barrington felt very little alarm on the present occasion, and was rather disposed to coincide with the views of the unfeeling Aunt Susan mentioned by Mr. Seymour, he could scarcely hesitate to obey the summons conveyed to him. The only question was whether he could and should see Mademoiselle de Mersac before sailing for England. Now as the Marseilles boat did not sail till noon on the following day, and as Barrington was aware that Jeanne was a very early riser, it is evident that he might have obtained an interview with her if he had so desired; but, in truth, he desired no such thing. To see Jeanne again would be pleasant; to hear from her own lips that she loved him would be pleasanter still; but to find himself an irrevocably engaged man would be—well, a shade less pleasant. Circumstances not of his creating or seeking had, as it appeared to this prudent lover, put it in his power to gain the very thing that he wanted—namely, the continuance of his present relations with the girl whom he loved. And why should he not take advantage of them? He had no thought of giving Jeanne up; nevertheless, he was not prepared immediately to ask her to be his wife. He wanted to blow hot and cold at the same time, in short, and thought he could now see his way to the accomplishment of this impossible feat. He resolved, therefore—though not without many sighs—that he would deny himself the delight of meeting her once more before his departure, and sat down to write her a letter instead.

Yet, when he had composed and addressed this *mi sive*, he was more than half inclined to tear it up again, and would very likely have done so if Madame de Trémonville's prophetic words had not hung in his memory, and warned him against straying from the safe path of delay.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH M. DE FONTVIEILLE TELLS AN OLD STORY.

‘MY DEAR MADEMOISELLE DE MERSAC,—I cannot tell you how disappointed I was at not meeting you at the ball last night. I was very sorry at the time, but I am a great deal more sorry now; for, as it turns out, I have not only missed the opportunity of a few pleasant dances with you, to which I have been looking forward immensely, but also that of bidding you good-bye.

‘I little thought, when I rode away from your door yesterday, that I had taken what may very likely be my last look of that dear and familiar house where I have passed so many happy hours and have met with a hospitality and kindness for which, I assure you, I am not ungrateful, though I have said little about it. But so it was to be. The mail brought me a letter from my brother-in-law, telling me of my sister’s serious illness, and begging me to return to England immediately. One cannot very well disregard a request of that kind, although in this particular instance it might perhaps be possible to do so without any real heartlessness or indifference. All my previous experience of my sister’s illnesses leads me to anticipate that, when I reach my journey’s end, I shall find that I might quite as well have remained where I am, and where I wish with all my heart that I could stay. But there is, of course, the possibility of matters being more serious than I imagine, and therefore I have no alternative but to go. By the time this reaches you I shall be on board the *Euphrate*, and outside the harbour, I daresay. I wonder whether you will be looking down at us from the terrace where I have so often stood beside you and watched the great steamers crawling away like toy-boats towards the horizon. I shall fancy you there, at any rate, and shall keep my eyes upon the old cliffs and woods until their outlines melt into the blue mass of a hilly coast, which, in its turn, will gradually fade into a dim cloud, and grow fainter and fainter till it vanishes altogether, and Algeria, for me, resolves itself into a memory.

‘I am sure I need not say how much I regret leaving in this abrupt manner; but, as you see, it is no fault of mine, and I am longing for the time to come when we shall meet in Switzer-

land, for I take it for granted that I am to be allowed to join you there. Would it be asking too much of your kindness to beg you to let me have a few lines as soon as your plans are fixed, saying when and where I may hope to see you again? A letter addressed to the Conservative Club, St. James's Street, or to the Travellers', Pall Mall, London, will always find me.

'Will you please make my excuses to the Duchesse de Breuil, and remember me very kindly to your brother and M. de Fontvieille?

'And believe me,

'My dear Mademoiselle de Mersac,

'Most sincerely yours,

'H. BARRINGTON.'

Looked upon in the light of a written farewell intended to imitate the letter of an engaged man to his *fiancée* as closely as may be without actually compromising the writer, the above composition can hardly be reckoned a success. Taken, on the other hand, as the last word of an unfortunate who has gone a great deal further than he meant, and sees no safety for himself but in flight, it may, perhaps, be considered as sufficiently suitable for its purpose—the manner in which such unfortunate may choose to blunder out of the meshes being of very slight importance. But, as the reader is aware, it was in the former, not in the latter character that Barrington regarded himself, and wished to be regarded; and if he had been a few years younger and a little less mortally afraid of committing himself to paper, he might possibly have produced some less clumsy expression of his sorrow at parting.

As it was, he was fully sensible of the defects of his letter, and had the grace to feel thoroughly ashamed of it. He perceived that it was too long, too constrained in tone, and, worst of all, too apologetic. He knew that after what had passed between him and Jeanne, he ought either to have said more or less. He even went further, and acknowledged to himself that, unless he were prepared to indite a formal offer of marriage, he ought not to have written at all. But in that case he must have resigned all intention of making such an offer at any future time; and this also he was not prepared to do. So, dissatisfied as he was with the result of his labours, he thrust it at length into an envelope, with a groan and a despairing shrug of his shoulders, feeling that the difficulties of the emergency were too many for him, and being, moreover, if the truth must be

told, a trifle pressed for time, for no man, lovelorn or otherwise, can set out upon a journey without having first packed up his clothes.

And in due course the missive reached its destination. It was brought up to the Campagne de Mersac by a messenger from the Hotel d'Orient, and was handed to Jeanne as she sat at the breakfast-table, round which, as ill-luck would have it, were grouped the Duchess, M. de Fontvieille, and Léon. Not half-a-dozen times in as many weeks did the Duchess leave her room before the afternoon was well advanced; scarcely more often was M. de Fontvieille wont to demand hospitality of his neighbours; while, as for the young master of the house, his avocations frequently led him miles away from home at the breakfast hour. But on this particular morning of all others, Madame de Breuil had woken up feeling unusually brisk and strong; M. de Fontvieille's cat had made a raid upon the fried soles and the dish of small birds to which that gentleman had been looking for his mid-day sustenance; and Léon, being in sore trouble of mind, had fallen out with Pierre Cauvin, and had ridden back in the sulks, leaving his day's duties half accomplished. Thus it came to pass that Jeanne had to open her letter in the presence of three witnesses; and, what was worse still, had to read it with six inquiring eyes fixed upon her face.

People who have intelligence of a startling nature to impart ought to send their communications in the ordinary manner, through the post. In these days, everybody gets one or two letters at breakfast-time, and may, by exercising a little self-command, make shift to receive a sharp epistolary blow without displaying unbecoming emotion, or exciting the attention of those who sit at meat with him—especially if, as is to be anticipated, the latter be busy over the study of their own correspondence. But a note delivered after post-hours must, in the nature of things, create some slight stir of curiosity in the least inquisitive and best-bred circles, which is sometimes apt to be a little hard upon the recipient, upon whom the consciousness of being more or less furtively watched can hardly fail to produce a sensation of discomfort. Had Barrington been possessed of that nice consideration for the feelings of others which he imagined—and still imagines—to be one of his most salient characteristics, he might possibly have thought of this, and put a stamp upon his letter. But being what he was, and having before his mind's eye a sentimental picture of Jeanne standing on the terrace and wistfully gazing after the good ship which

was bearing her lover away beyond the seas, he chose rather to expend five francs upon sending it up the hill by special messenger. The consequence was that M. de Fontvieille was interrupted in the middle of a piquant anecdote, and was fain to wind it up in a hurried and lame manner; for he and his audience too were naturally anxious to learn what news could be contained in Jeanne's lengthy epistle, and as naturally tried to discover from her features whether it were of an agreeable or interesting feature.

They might, however, as well have looked at each other, or at the pictures on the wall. Jeanne, who was habitually pale, seldom changed colour, and was never more outwardly calm than when she was most deeply moved. She perused her letter very slowly and deliberately folded it up again, restored it to its envelope, and then, without saying a word to anybody, resumed her occupation of breaking up dog-biscuit for Turco's breakfast.

If there was one thing that irritated the Duchess more than another, it was conduct of this kind. She was an inquisitive old body, who liked to have a finger in everyone's business, and to be consulted in every emergency. She hated secrets (except, of course, her own, which she made a prodigious fuss over), and could not bear the thought that anything in the shape of a mystery should exist under the same roof with her. Sooner, indeed, than that matters should remain in so unsatisfactory a condition she would clear them up by means of direct questions; but this was a humiliating mode of procedure to which she seldom resorted until she had essayed to work round to her end through a series of artless circumlocutions.

Upon the present occasion she drummed upon the table impatiently with her withered, jewelled fingers for a minute or two, and then, addressing herself to nobody in particular, remarked that it was a strange thing that people never came to see her now. And yet, she resumed, after a momentary break, perhaps it was not such a very strange thing after all. She was a very old woman, and loneliness was one of the necessary evils of old age. 'You and I, my dear M. de Fontvieille, have been out of the race for many years past; and, perhaps, it is too much to expect that young people should take the trouble to amuse us. They have their own interests and their own pleasures, which they keep to themselves, without thinking, perhaps, that we, too, like to have our share in what goes on around us. Very likely they find us in the way. Well, they

have the consolation of knowing that we cannot interfere with them long.'

'My letter is from Mr. Barrington. Would you like to read it, madame?' asked Jeanne, who did not like circumlocutions.

'I make it a rule never to read correspondence which is not addressed to me,' answered the old lady, with dignity, 'particularly when it is written in a language which I do not understand.'

Whereat M. de Fontvieille had a little laugh all to himself behind his napkin.

'He writes to say that he has been suddenly called away to England by the illness of his sister, and to apologise for not having been able to call and say good-bye to us,' continued Jeanne. 'He particularly begs me to make his excuses to you, madame.'

'And so he is really gone!' said the Duchess. 'I regret it very sincerely. He was an amiable and entertaining young man, and I had become accustomed to seeing him here. The house will seem quite dull at first without him.'

'We shall all miss Mr. Barrington,' observed Léon; 'and Jeanne more than any of us.'

'I shall miss him very much,' said Jeanne, steadily; 'but in any case he could hardly have remained here much longer at this season of the year. That is the worst of making friends with birds of passage. As soon as one has got to know them tolerably well they are off, and one probably never sees them again.'

'I should be sorry to think that we had seen the last of Mr. Barrington,' remarked the Duchess.

'Does he not speak of returning, Jeanne?'

'Oh, no! He says something about meeting us in Switzerland in the summer.'

'I shall never be able to drag myself as far as Switzerland,' sighed the old lady—'never, I am convinced. The next journey I shall undertake will be a short one—only as far as the cemetery. I dread the hot season here, but I will not run the risk of dying in an hotel, and leaving Jeanne with all the trouble and inconvenience of arranging about the funeral. If Léon could be with me, I should not so much mind.'

'I will certainly accompany you, madame, if you wish it,' said Léon, speaking without much alacrity.

'No, no, *mon enfant*, you have your own affairs to attend

to; and, besides, I prefer to be buried here. I have my piece of ground waiting for me, as you know, and as soon as I have arranged one or two little matters I shall be ready enough to occupy it. By-the-bye, what has become of M. de Saint-Luc? It is a century since I have heard of him.'

In this way Barrington's departure escaped further remark; and, for the next quarter of an hour, the conversation turned chiefly upon matters of local gossip. Jeanne took her share in it from time to time, and was neither more nor less taciturn than usual; but M. de Fontvieille, who was an observant old person, noticed that she left the remainder of her breakfast untouched.

I suppose that everybody is, in a greater or less degree, dowered with that blessed gift of self-deception without which the infinite sadness of life would become almost unendurable; but some, no doubt, are more highly favoured in this respect than others. Jeanne, for instance, though quite able, and even rather prone, to form a mistaken estimate of characters and motives, had a singularly clear vision and defective imagination where facts were concerned; and it was upon the basis of facts, and not hypotheses, that she was accustomed to shape her actions. Barrington's letter left her no room for pleasant delusions either as to his meaning or as to her own destiny. She had said to herself the day before that he should decide her fate; and now he had emphatically done so, though in a different manner from that which she had anticipated. For her she knew that there could henceforth be no more uncertainty. The die was cast, and the remainder of her life must be spent not with the man whom she loved, but with one for whom, at that time, she felt an absolute abhorrence. At the first moment the one thing that seemed to her most necessary was, that she should so bear herself as that no one should guess at the wound she had received; and of this task, as we have seen, she acquitted herself not discreditably, failing only in that one point of inability to swallow food.

When breakfast was at an end, she betook herself to her own room, and, sitting down before her dressing-table, took the letter from her pocket, and read it over again from beginning to end. There was no misunderstanding it, she thought, as she laid it gently aside without a shadow of resentment against the writer. She was a hundred miles from interpreting it correctly, and never doubted of the necessity of Barrington's journey to England; but she plainly saw that, had he intended asking her

to be his wife, he would not have left Algeria without doing so. How could she have made so terrible a mistake? That was the question which was uppermost in her mind, and which she asked herself over and over again with bitter mortification. She—a woman in her twenty-third year—a woman, too, who was not by nature romantic, and had seen more of the world and of men than ninety-nine French girls out of a hundred are permitted to do—she to confound intimacy with love, and to take a few light words *au grand sérieux*, like any child of seventeen just released from the convent! It was not an agreeable thought.

‘I have only myself to blame,’ she murmured. ‘I have allowed myself to love him—Heaven grant I may not have allowed him to see that I love him!—and now I must suffer for it. What is done cannot be undone; and, if it could, I am not sure that I should wish it to be so; all that remains for me to do is to save the family from disaster, and to gratify the wishes of all my friends. It is a sort of consolation; and I care so little now what becomes of me, that there is no fear of my courage failing—only I wish M. de Saint-Luc were a little less contemptible.’

Jeanne was not altogether heroic. She was ready and willing to make the great sacrifice which, as she conceived, duty and affection required of her; but there she stopped short. Of what she might owe to her future husband she did not think at all. He had played a game of cards for her, and had won his stake; let him be satisfied. What more could such a man claim from her than that she should carry his name untarnished to her grave? As for affection—*allons donc!* ‘I may forgive you in time, but him I shall never forgive,’ she had said to Léon the day before; and her altered circumstances had produced no change in her sentiments. She had already, in some sort, pardoned her brother, but towards Saint-Luc she harboured no feeling save one of mingled anger and disdain.

Nor was she insensible of the tremendous loneliness of her position. Self-reliant and self-contained as she was, a chill ran through her when she remembered that no living soul would pity her; that she would receive congratulations from all sides upon an act of moral suicide; and that, for the rest of her life, she must manage to get on without the support of any sympathy. Nothing but pride and utter indifference could carry her through, she thought, as she slowly descended the staircase, and stepped out into the garden, where sympathy, in an unex-

pected form, had been patiently waiting for her half an hour or more.

M. de Fontvieille, excellent man, had preserved, under a thin veneer of cynicism of which he was inordinately proud, a heart still open to the generous impulses of youth, and easily touched by any episode of a sentimental nature. Less blind than the Duchess and Léon, he had long ago discerned the nature of the friendship which had sprung up between Jeanne and the Englishman; the incidents of the Kabylean excursion had not been thrown away upon him; by degrees his hope of seeing his *protégée* well married to one of her own countrymen had yielded to a kindly desire that her hand might follow where her heart had already been given; and, understanding, as he did, the cruel nature of the blow which had now fallen upon her, he was determined that at least she should not lack such solace as it is in the power of a sympathetic spirit to bestow.

If Barrington, leaning over the taffrail of the steamer, and gazing sentimentally up at the wooded heights of El Biar, had been provided with a sufficiently powerful telescope, he would have made out, not the tall graceful form which he fondly hoped might be stationed there, but a grotesque little straw-hatted figure gesticulating like a marionette, and from time to time shaking a puny fist towards the sea.

‘Go, perfidious Æneas!’ cried the old gentleman, apostrophising the faithless one in the style of the year 1810. ‘Go, and leave the noble and unhappy Dido to consume upon the pyre of unrequited love! Go back to the chill fogs of thy melancholy island, and languish there, a prey to remorse and the spleen! Go—and the devil go with thee!’

Somewhat relieved by this outburst, M. de Fontvieille strutted back towards the house, whence poor Dido, a little pale and heavy-lidded, had just issued. Removing his Panamà hat, and bowing more profoundly than usual in homage alike to beauty and misfortune, ‘Mademoiselle,’ said he, ‘I come to beg a favour of you. My collection of gems——’

‘But, monsieur, I inspected them from the first to the last only two days ago,’ pleaded poor Jeanne, who wanted to be left alone.

‘Pardon me, mademoiselle, there was one drawer which you did not see then, and have never seen yet. It is that which I propose to show you to-day.’

‘But I must go to the dairy; and I have the linen to count, and ——’

‘Mademoiselle, I am convinced that your admirable Fanchette is capable of replacing you for an hour. For the rest, I will not detain you long ; but I have a fancy to display my greatest treasures to you to-day, and you are too kind to thwart an old man’s whim.’

Not seeing her way to resisting this appeal, Jeanne resignedly put up her parasol, and accepted M. de Fontvieille’s proffered arm. She would have walked more comfortably alone, for she was a good head taller than her companion ; and age, together with the unconscionable tightness of his varnished boots, had deprived him of absolute control over his legs, so that it took a good deal of humouring and management to keep his head straight, and preserve him from sudden involuntary inroads into the flower-beds ; but to decline such an equivocal support would have been to grievously affront the old gentleman, who held it an essential point of courtesy to conduct all lady-visitors to his door in this slightly ridiculous fashion, and who to-day seemed anxious to surpass himself in small marks of attention towards his young guest.

When he had led Jeanne into his little dark *salon*, and had made her seat herself in the most comfortable arm-chair that the room contained, he trotted away, and returned presently, bearing in his arms a worsted-work footstool, which he placed under her feet, and, recovering his perpendicular not without an effort, remarked triumphantly, ‘Now we are at our ease.’

Then he unlocked the folding doors of the old-fashioned cabinet which held his precious collection, and rapidly pulled out the first few drawers, closing them again without daring to glance at their contents lest the temptation to mount his hobby should prove too strong for him. ‘All these we have already seen,’ he said, ‘and I will not fatigue you by going over them again, though I have some rubies here which well merit—but no matter, let us proceed. You may perhaps have noticed that I have never opened the lowest drawer in your presence. There is nothing in it, as you perceive, but an old leather case, which, to tell you the truth, is not worth five francs, including what it contains. But now I will tell you something that will give you a little interest in it. That leather case was made for me half a century ago ; and from that day to this, nobody has ever looked inside it but myself. If I may say so without profanity, it is, in a manner, like those *châsses* which you may see in certain cathedrals, and which are only opened once in every ten or twenty years. They contain nothing more than the usual

fragments of the true cross, or garments of the Blessed Virgin, or whatever it may be; but when the day comes for the exhibition of the *Grandes Reliques*, people flock from miles round to contemplate them. And why? Because they cannot do so every day.'

He had been fumbling at his watch-chain while he was speaking, and now he detached therefrom a small gold key, which he pressed into the lock of the case.

'*Voilà mes Grandes Reliques, mademoiselle,*' said he, lifting the lid, and drawing back a step to allow her to approach.

Jeanne bent forward, and saw very much what she had expected to see—two or three brown, withered flowers, which had once been roses, a long kid glove yellow with age, a scrap of ribbon, and a miniature representing a lady with a high forehead, an enormous pair of black eyes, and a little prim, smiling mouth.

'You do not find her beautiful,' remarked M. de Fontvieille. '*Mon Dieu*, you are right! she never was so; although I must say that that miniature gives no more idea of what she was than the photographs of the present day will do of you and your contemporaries. It is only great artists who can produce a faithful likeness, and my poor Madeleine had not the means of paying a great artist, or even a mediocre one. She was only the daughter of a country gentleman of good family, but small fortune, who lived all the year round upon his property in the Bourbonnais, and cultivated his vines, and knew little and cared less about the outer world. His estate adjoined that of an uncle of mine, and it was while upon a visit to him that I first met Madeleine. I was at that time about eight-and-twenty, and in many respects an older man than I am now, when my age may be nearly represented by the same figures in reversed order. I had lived in Paris from the day I had left my college; I had tried every form of pleasure, I had made myself acquainted with every grade of society, and I flattered myself that the world had no new sensation left to bestow upon me. I was more than half tired of life, as young men often are when their health begins to give way from the effects of dissipation, and when they are up to the eyes in debt. I was sick of dicing and brawling, and—and the rest of it; and yet I did not see how I was to kill time without the help of these amusements. In short, I was so disheartened and disgusted with myself and my prospects that I had more than once gravely debated the advisability of entering a Trappist monastery when I encountered Made-

leine, one sunny morning, in the village, and abandoned all idea of taking vows for which I was perhaps hardly fitted by nature.

‘As I have already said, she was no great beauty; but she was as innocent as an angel, as gay as a lark, and her manners had an easy naïve grace which came from natural good breeding, not from the acquired elegances of an artificial society. There was a charm about her which exceeded the charms of the *grand monde* to which I was accustomed, as the fresh scent of a tuft of wild thyme excels the sickly odour of the stephanotis. It was not, however, for these reasons, but simply because she was herself, that I fell in love with her; and if all the philosophers in the world were to lecture to you upon the origin of love, for hours together, they could give you no clearer explanation of the phenomenon than this. There are people, I firmly believe, who go down to their graves, after a long life, without ever having been in love at all. For myself, although I was at one time somewhat notorious for adventures of a kind which I can do no more than allude to in conversation with you, mademoiselle, and although I may have felt for certain ladies a sentiment which, for want of a better word, we dignify by the name of love, I can assure you in all seriousness that I have only been in love once.

‘Whether my dear Madeleine was ever attached to me in the same manner as I was to her, I cannot say. Probably not. But, at all events, she loved me well enough to make me as happy as a king during the three weeks that I was betrothed to her. At the expiration of that time our engagement came to an end in the stupidest and most commonplace way in the world. In order to obtain her father’s consent to our union, I had been compelled to deceive him a little as to the state of my affairs, and especially to draw a veil over the history of my life in Paris. A good-natured relation of his, whom I had met some half-dozen times in the capital, was kind enough to tear down this veil, and to exhibit to the worthy man such a picture of my past career as caused him to cry out in horror that he would never entrust his daughter’s happiness to the care of a spendthrift and a libertine. In vain I protested that I had repented of my evil ways, and was determined to lead a new life. The risk was too great, he said; and, to put an end to further discussion, he hastily betrothed Madeleine to one of his neighbours, a sober, red-headed young man, who had never done wrong in his life, through sheer lack of sufficient originality to

leave the strictly religious groove into which his parents had pushed him.

‘My poor little *fiancée* yielded without making much resistance—she would as soon have thought of cutting her father’s throat as of disobeying him—and I went back to Paris, crazy with despair, and ready to put an end to myself. As you perceive, however, I did not do this. I continued to exist; and eventually married Madame de Fontvieille, with whom I lived in perfect harmony for twenty years. She was an excellent woman; she brought me a handsome *dot*; and I never disturbed her peace of mind by showing her the poor relics which now lie before you. The fact of my having preserved them is sufficient evidence that through all that has come and gone—through sorrow and mirth, sickness and health, marriage and old age—I have remained faithful in my heart to my only love. Perhaps if my dream had been realised, I might have been less constant; I cannot tell. It is a common saying that marriage kills love, but I am not convinced that it does so in all cases. However that may be, I have always felt that I owe Madeleine not only eternal love, but eternal gratitude. But for her I might have never suspected the existence of that divine spark in my nature which is common to all human beings. I might have lived and died like a beast, as thousands do. Having known and loved her, I could never fall back again under the sway of my five senses, nor persuade myself that the object of life was to gratify them. I cannot boast of having performed many good actions; but if I have helped a fellow-creature here and there, if I have forgiven an injury or two, and abstained occasionally from harming those whom I have been tempted to wrong, the credit is Madeleine’s. Ah, *mon enfant*! this world is a dismal purgatory, full of liars and thieves and traitors and wretches of all kinds. It would be impossible to believe in the perfectibility of the species if we did not know that we are capable of loving one another. Such, at least, is my notion; and that is why I conclude that to have loved another is a thing to be thankful for in itself, whether one succeed or fail in gaining the object of one’s desire.

‘Why have I told you this long history to-day? Partly because I have bequeathed my jewels to you, and I wish you, as soon as I am dead, to take the case that you know of, and, without saying anything to anybody, to slip it quietly into my coffin; and partly because the experiences of the old are sometimes a comfort to the young. If, by any chance, a man finds

himself in the midst of a sandy desert and is not very sure whether he will ever escape from it, it is something to come across the traces of others who have passed by the same way, and who have neither fainted nor died. It is something——’

M. de Fontvieille stopped short, fearing lest he might have said too much ; but Jeanne was not offended. She had perceived from the outset that her old friend had discovered her secret, and she was not altogether sorry that it should be so. Few people like to be openly pitied ; but there are extremities in which even the proudest are glad to think that some discreet person can understand their trouble, and secretly feel for them. Jeanne had listened to M. de Fontvieille’s narrative with genuine interest. This octogenarian weeping over a withered rose, dilating upon the divine origin of love, mixing up sentiment, vanity, and bathos with the most innocent unself-consciousness, had not appeared to her ridiculous. His fidelity touched her ; his ideas in some sort chimed in with her own. If the mere delight of memory had sufficed to brighten his whole life, why should not the same source of consolation be open to her ? It was true that as yet she could hardly bring herself to fancy that it could be so. Her wound was too fresh ; her heart ached with too bitter a longing to see Barrington again, were it but for an hour ; but time would doubtless bring her more calmness. After all, the worst part of the ordeal which lay before her was that of which her would-be consoler knew nothing. The prospect of a lonely life—of devoting herself to the service of others, or of entering a convent—would have had no terrors for her ; but to be chained for the rest of her days to an uncongenial companion, as the unhappy convicts used to be at the Toulon *bagne*—to know that no escape from him was possible, and to be forced, in sheer self-defence, to treat him at least as a friend—what more unhappy destiny than this could any woman accept ? Following out this train of thought, she spoke at length :

‘Why did you marry, monsieur ? You were not obliged to do so.’

M. de Fontvieille shrugged his shoulders. ‘Obliged !—no : but it seemed expedient. When I gave up my old mode of life and my old companions I was very dull. After a time I thought the best thing I could do would be to ally myself to a good, sensible woman who could contribute her share towards the payment of the household expenses ; and I assure you I never regretted having taken the step. Marriage is an admirable

institution, but a trifle prosaic: the essential thing is that the husband and wife should start by understanding one another. I never pretended to any romantic affection for Madame de Fontvieille, nor did she ever look for anything of the kind from me. You, who have been educated a little *à l'anglaise*, probably regard marriages of convenience with horror; for my own part, I think they are very good things. In every man's life there comes a time when he feels the necessity of having a home of his own, and domestic interests. Women, from the nature of their position, must experience the same want far more keenly. If lovers are able to marry, so much the better for them; but I see no reason why two people who esteem one another should not live together quite contentedly without any warmer feeling. I married Madame de Fontvieille because I required a home, and I told her so honestly. I never let her know that my heart belonged, and would always belong, to another woman; but if she had happened to find it out, she would have had no right to complain.'

'You do not think, then, that it is wrong for a woman to marry one man, and continue to love another?'

M. de Fontvieille made a grimace. This was not exactly the doctrine he had intended to inculcate, and he felt that he was getting upon dangerous ground.

'*Mon Dieu!*' he said, 'that depends a little. In matters of this kind it is impossible to lay down a general rule which will fit all cases. My object in relating my own experience to you was to show that it is a good thing to have loved—even in vain.'

'No doubt,' answered Jeanne, gravely. 'I have understood what you have meant,' she resumed, after a short pause; 'it would be absurd to pretend that I have not, and I am grateful to you for confiding in me, and sympathising with me; but—'

'My dear child,' cried M. de Fontvieille, waving his yellow silk pocket-handkerchief, 'it has been a sweet consolation to me to reopen my old wounds in your presence. Only those who have suffered themselves can truly feel for the suffering. In future you will freely confide your troubles to me—we will mingle our tears——'

'No,' broke in Jeanne, 'I am not one of those who enjoy shedding tears.' Then seeing that the old gentleman looked hurt, she added, 'You know that if I could speak to anybody upon—the subject you have alluded to, I would speak to you; but you must see that, for the future, the less said about it the

better. I shall not forget what you have said, and you may be sure that I will carry out your instructions about the little leather case when the time comes. And now I must really go to the dairy.'

'Marvellous is the power of love!' ejaculated M. de Fontvicille, after he had seen Jeanne to the door, and had carefully locked up his precious cabinet. 'Here is a woman who is told that jewels to the value of some hundred thousand francs will be hers in a few years' time at furthest, and who does not think the announcement worth so much as a word of notice. Ah, animal of an Englishman! what have you ever done to merit such devotion?'

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN WHICH M. DE SAINT-LUC HEARS OF SOMETHING TO HIS ADVANTAGE.

It is an ill wind that blows nobody any good—even an east wind is welcome to outward-bound ships—and Barrington's hasty exit from Algeria, if it caused some heart-aching in one quarter that we know of, was productive of nothing but unalloyed delight in another.

Saint-Luc as he stood upon his balcony, and watched the *Euphrate* steaming slowly out of harbour, rubbed his hands in glee, feeling that a formidable obstacle had been removed from his path. Whatever difficulties might yet intervene between him and the successful issue of his suit—and he was not disposed to underrate either their number or their magnitude—that of the presence of a possible rival need no longer be included among them; nor would it henceforth be necessary for him so to time his visits to the Campagne de Mersac as that they should not clash with those of the inevitable Englishman.

He rode up the same afternoon to inquire whether Mademoiselle de Mersac had recovered from her indisposition; but he only left a card at the door, without dismounting, fearing lest a too speedy appearance upon the field so lately vacated by the enemy might savour of undue precipitation. In a like prudent spirit he refrained from any endeavour to meet Jeanne until the return of Madame de Breuil's weekly reception-day afforded him an excuse for once more turning his horse's head

in the direction of El Biar ; and even then, as it turned out, he failed to obtain the interview he had hoped for.

Madame la Duchesse had discontinued her receptions for the summer months, the servant told him, in answer to his inquiry ; but he would ask whether she was well enough to see monsieur. Mademoiselle Jeanne had already gone out. Under the circumstances Saint-Luc did not much care about being admitted ; but as he could hardly say so consistently with politeness, he waited at the door, in a broiling sun, while the man departed on his mission, and was presently rewarded by a request that he would be so kind as to walk upstairs, the Duchess being unable to leave her bedroom.

The Duchess's bedroom was spacious, airy, and luxuriously furnished. It belonged to the modern portion of the house, and had nothing Moorish either in its construction or in its appointments. The low bedstead, with its lace-bordered covering, the soft-cushioned chairs of all shapes and sizes, the Louis XIV writing-table, the inlaid cabinets, and the numberless knick-nacks were as evidently of Parisian origin as was the owner of all these pretty things, who, from the sofa upon which she lay, with her quilted silk peignoir wrapped about her, greeted Saint-Luc in feeble and rather querulous accents.

'Come in, monsieur, and sit down. I do not apologise for receiving you here ; the bedroom of a dying old woman is as much open to the world as a *chapelle ardente*.'

Saint-Luc, with the best possible intention, declared that, if he might judge by appearances, he was in the room of a lady who had a great many years of life and health before her ; but his observation was not well received.

'Eh, eh ! what is the use of repeating such *banalités* as that,' cried the Duchess, petulantly. 'I am hundreds of years old, and I have ailments enough to kill a Hercules. Add to that, perpetual anxiety and worry, for which you are chiefly answerable.'

'I, madame ?'

'Certainly. You know that my one wish is to provide a home for Jeanne before I take my leave of her and of this troublesome world. How many months is it that I have been waiting, waiting to hear that you have arranged matters with her ?'

'Madame, you will allow that I am just as anxious as you can be to arrive at the result which we both desire. But you will also allow that the case is an exceptional one. And no

doubt, too, you will remember that when I formally requested Mademoiselle de Mersac's hand, shortly after my arrival in Algiers, you yourself told me that I could never hope to obtain it in that simple fashion, but that I must gain her affections before her consent.'

'*Mon Dieu*, yes; I told you that it would be necessary to woo her *à l'anglaise*; but I suppose that even the English put some limit to their wooing. We do not live in the days of the patriarchs; and if you are content to play the part of Jacob, I am not so sure that Jeanne is prepared to accept that of Rachel, while it is absolutely certain that I am no Rebekah. The whole winter through you have been showering bouquets and compliments and tender glances at the girl, and for my part I cannot see that you are any nearer the end than you were when you started. To tell you the truth, M. de Saint-Luc, you astonish me. It is inconceivable that you, who, if half the stories one hears be true, know how to make yourself irresistible among the ladies of Paris, the most *blasées* women in the whole world, should have any difficulty in captivating a child like Jeanne.'

Saint Luc smiled and made a deprecating gesture.

'The knowledge which you attribute to me, madame, is not likely to help me much here. It is precisely because my experience of your charming sex has lain entirely within the limits of a certain class that I am altogether at sea when I am removed from it. It may be very ridiculous, but it is unfortunately true, that I have no idea how to set about attracting the affections of a lady whom I not only love, but respect.'

'Ah, bah! All women are the same, my dear Vicomte, and you ought to know it. It is not by sighing and looking piteous that you will obtain anything of them. A lover who understands his business neither argues nor entreats—he simply takes what he wants.'

'I doubt whether that method would succeed with Mademoiselle de Mersac.'

'Why should it not succeed as well with her as with another? At least you might give it a trial, for it would be better than your present method—admitting that you have one. If you will not even ask, how can you expect to receive?'

'Supposing that I had already asked, and had been refused?'

'What!' cried the old lady, starting up from her recumbent position. 'Do you mean me to understand that she has actually refused you, and never said a word to me about it?'

It is too bad ! But in that case there is no more to be said ; and I have been wasting, Heaven only knows how much good time and patience ! You are aware that Jeanne is completely her own mistress. If she has declined your offer, it is apparently because you have failed to please her. I deplore her decision, but I can assure you, if you do not know it already, that I have no power to make her alter it.'

'I have no illusions upon that point, madame. I have only a hope—a faint one, I admit—still just a hope that, in process of time, she herself may reconsider her choice. I am in every respect unworthy of her ; but for all that, I think I can offer her a more complete devotion than she is likely to meet with elsewhere. All that I have to trust to is the chance that she may sooner or later discover this, and that it may have some influence upon her.'

The Duchess did not seem to think much of this forlorn hope. She pursed up her lips, wrinkled her brow, and reflected.

'You are too modest,' she said at length. 'Keep on repeating to a girl that you are unworthy of her, and the chances are that she will end by believing you. It is possible that, as you say, you may make her love you at last by mere force of loving her. I have heard of cases of that kind, though I cannot say that I have ever personally known of such a one. But the truth is that the experiment demands more time than we can give you, or than you have a right to ask. Come, M. de Saint-Luc, you are a man of the world, and you will not be offended if I speak to you frankly. You, very naturally and very prettily, look at this matter from the romantic point of view. I, as naturally, if not quite as prettily, view it in its practical aspect. I have no ambitious or selfish aims to serve ; all I wish is that Jeanne should get a good husband and a comfortable home : and I know that, so long as I live, the connections which I have still kept up will enable me to put such chances in her way. When I am gone, the case will be very different. Only this morning I had a letter from France, telling me of two young men, highly suitable in every way, who are anxious to settle down, and form an alliance with some lady of good birth and moderate fortune. For my own part, if I could see any reasonable probability that your hopes would be realised, I should ask nothing better than to send these gentlemen about their business ; but candidly, do you think I ought to do so ?'

‘You must act as you think best, madame,’ answered Saint-Luc with a sigh.

‘Yes; but don’t you see that if another suitor is to appear upon the scene, your presence would become a little embarrassing? I think I may fairly ask that this question should be settled now, one way or the other. Repeat your proposal, and let there be an end of it.’

‘That would be worse than useless. I admit the justice of what you say, madame, and I am ready to withdraw, if you ask me to do so; but I decline to subject myself to the certainty of a second rejection.’

‘Then let me speak for you. Possibly I may be able to plead your cause more effectually than you could do yourself. At all events, I can tell you one thing for your comfort; if there be the faintest chance for you, I shall be much more likely to discover it than you would be. I will have a little talk with Jeanne to-night, and you shall hear the result to-morrow morning.’

‘The result,’ observed Saint-Luc, getting up, and taking his hat, ‘is not very doubtful. As soon as I receive your intimation that it is all up with me, I shall take my passage for Marseilles. I love Mademoiselle de Mersac too well to remain here as an obstacle in the way of her happiness, or even of her convenience. But if, as is possible, the two candidates whom you speak of should prove no more fortunate than I have been, I shall ask your permission to return some day.’

‘You will not require my permission,’ answered the Duchess, a little touched by so much docility, ‘but you shall have it, with all my heart—and my best wishes into the bargain.’

So Saint-Luc went his way sorrowfully; and being disposed neither for sleep nor society, sat up nearly all the night through, with dull care to keep him company. In the Duchess’s powers of persuasion he had no confidence at all, and he was far indeed from suspecting what fruit his careless suggestion, thrown out merely as a means of quieting what appeared to him an absurd and boyish scruple on Léon’s part, had already borne. All the more profound was his stupefaction when, early the next morning, he received the following brief note:—

‘What possessed you, my dear monsieur, to give me violent emotions and upset my health without any reason? I should be tempted to call you hard names if I were not too contented to be vexed with anybody. Jeanne, dear child, offers no opposition whatever to our wishes; and if you will look in upon us

this afternoon, you shall hear from her own lips what I hope you will consider good news. To think that you should have reached your time of life without discovering that when a woman says no, she almost invariably means yes! I felicitate you, and press your hand cordially.

‘LOUISE DE BREUIL.’

If these few lines had been written in Chinese instead of in the clearest and most explicit French, they could not have puzzled Saint-Luc more utterly. Between the time when they were handed to him by his servant and that which he deemed the earliest permissible for obeying the invitation they conveyed, he had ample leisure to peruse and re-peruse them till he had got them by heart; but at the end of all he could extract from them no more agreeable deduction than that there must be some mistake somewhere. It was all very well for Madame de Breuil to reiterate the old dictum that feminine negatives are usually equivalent to affirmatives, but this, like most general propositions, failed to hold water when applied to a particular instance; and Saint-Luc was neither foolish enough to believe that Jeanne was in love with him nor clever enough to guess at the true state of affairs. He was, therefore, in no wise sanguine or jubilant, and spent the greater part of the day in pacing up and down his room, and in exclaiming at intervals, ‘It is impossible!’

Thus it came about that M. de Saint-Luc displayed less ease and *aplomb* upon the occasion of his first meeting with his future bride than might have been expected from a gentleman so renowned for good breeding. For when he was shown into the drawing-room, Jeanne rose, in her slow, stately way, from the sofa upon which she had been seated, and advanced a few steps towards him, holding out her hand, and behind her stood the Duchess, all smiles, and Léon smiling too, but looking a little puzzled and anxious withal; and it was evident that he, on his part, was expected to do or say something, and that nobody was going to help him out with his task. No form of polite dismissal would have found him unprepared, and he would have known how, in such a case, to retire without loss of dignity; but so little had he believed in his good fortune that he had omitted to rehearse any scene in which he might be called upon to act the part of an accepted lover, and now, in his surprise and perplexity, he searched in vain for some appropriate words.

At length, after a pause, during which Jeanne contemplated

him with perfect impassibility, and the Duchess began to fidget a little, he did what was, perhaps, upon the whole, the best thing he could have done, he took the cool white hand offered to him, and bent respectfully over it, just touching it with his lips. And as he did so, he noticed that Jeanne shivered ever so slightly. She returned to her sofa without any other display of emotion, and then the Duchess's tongue became loosened.

'You see, monsieur, that I am not such a bad ambassadress, after all. Have I acquitted myself of my mission to your satisfaction? Then come and thank me, for I deserve some thanks. Ah, how contented I am! I am ten years younger since yesterday. You will not get rid of me as soon as you expect, perhaps. Henceforward you will be as a son to me, for you know that I have always looked upon Jeanne as my daughter. Apropos, what is your Christian name? Charles? What a comfort!—that is a good name—a name that can offend nobody. Do you know that I have been tormenting myself all the morning with a horrid fear that it might be Achille, or Alcibiade, or something grotesque. It is a point upon which I am rather particular. Once—I shall never forget it—my poor father wished me to marry a man named Léonce. Happily there were other objections to him, and the affair fell through. Léonce! It would have been impossible for me to address him without laughing. I detest classical names—the Republic and the Empire have vulgarised them for ever. Jeanne is a pretty name, do you not think so? But of course you do. I am a silly old woman to ask such a question.'

Under cover of this artillery of prattle Saint-Luc managed to collect his scattered ideas. By the time that the old lady had paused for want of breath, he had got his little speech ready, and he delivered it in straightforward and unaffected language.

'You know, madame—and so do you, Léon—and so also does mademoiselle herself—how little I have ventured to expect the happiness that has come to me. All I can say is that I will do my best to show myself worthy of it. It would be ridiculous presumption on my part to assume that mademoiselle has any such feeling for me as I have for her—indeed, I know that it is not so. But this I can promise to her, and to you all, that if she ever comes to repent of her choice, it shall not be through any fault of mine.'

He looked a little wistfully at Jeanne as he spoke the last words, but she only inclined her head slightly without speaking,

and he turned, with a half sigh, towards Léon, who promptly grasped him by the hand, thinking that the proper thing to do under the circumstances, and remarked felicitously that he had always known things would come right in the end, and had said so, if Saint-Luc remembered, at Fort Napoléon. Then, murmuring something about being obliged to go to the stables, he slipped quietly away, and when he was fairly out in the open air, drew a long breath, and congratulated himself in that he had passed over an uncertain piece of ground without making any false steps.

In the drawing-room an awkward period of silence supervened. Saint-Luc had said his say; Jeanne did not choose to speak at all; and the Duchess's spirits were somewhat damped by the solemnity of the younger people.

'I think I will go upstairs and rest for a little,' she said, gathering up her shawl, her book, and her other belongings; 'all this excitement has tired me. I shall find you here when I come down again no doubt,' she added to Saint-Luc, who rose to open the door for her.

'If mademoiselle will put up with my company for so long,' he answered, trying to smile.

Jeanne had got up, when he turned round after closing the door, and was standing, with her elbow resting upon the mantelpiece, fanning herself leisurely with one of those dried palmetto-leaves which no Algerian lady is without during the hot months.

'Why not?' she asked, replying to his last remark, although it had not been addressed to her. 'We shall have to put up with one another now until one of us dies.'

'The prospect is not an agreeable one to you, mademoiselle, I fear,' said Saint-Luc, stung through all his humility by her cool contempt.

'Not very: but it does not much signify. It is unfortunate for me that I was brought up to think that girls should choose their own husbands, as they do in England. In my case it has turned out a mistake; and in truth I suppose it is better that every nation should keep to its own customs. Let us endeavour to think that I am altogether French, and that our betrothal is one of the ordinary kind. You marry me because you wish to settle down, and I marry you because my family desire it. There need be no question of love between us.'

'Pardon me, there is a great deal of love; but it is all on one side. I do not complain of that; but, mademoiselle, I love

you so dearly that I would far rather go away now, and never see you again, than condemn you to a life of unhappiness. If, as it seems, I can inspire you with nothing but repugnance, why——?’

‘Why have I accepted you? I thought I had already answered that question. Because my family wish it. For the rest, I did not mean you to understand that you were repugnant to me. I certainly do not love you—after what passed between us at Fort Napoléon you must be aware of that; but I shall do my duty; I shall try to like you, and—respect you, if I can.’

‘Be it so. I do not despair. Love begets love, they say, and some day I may gain yours.’

‘Pray, pray do not expect that,’ returned Jeanne, with great earnestness. ‘It can never be. I am not submissive, and I am not always good-tempered, I am afraid; but I will do my best to make your home comfortable if you will not talk about love. More than that I cannot do;—and you cannot expect more,’ she added, with a touch of defiance.

‘I am contented,’ answered Saint-Luc, looking, however, a little sad over it.

The man’s excessive meekness exasperated Jeanne. The colour mounted into her cheeks, and she tore off a corner of her palmetto fan and crushed it between her fingers.

‘I cannot in the least understand you!’ she exclaimed half involuntarily. ‘It seems to me that you are doing a very foolish thing; but I suppose you must be the best judge of your own actions, and at any rate I have not deceived you. And now I have something to say which had better be said at once and done with, for it is about a disagreeable matter which I do not intend to allude to again. I wish you to know that Léon has told me about the money which he lost to you at cards, and about the manner in which you and he seem to have agreed that it should be paid.’

Saint-Luc looked vexed. ‘I wish Léon had not spoken to you about that silly affair,’ he said. ‘It was all a misunderstanding. There is no real debt at all; but he took an absurd notion into his head that he was bound to pay me an immense sum which I never had the remotest intention of accepting from him; and he was so obstinate over it that, to quiet him, I suggested the first way out of the difficulty that occurred to me. I am sorry now that I did not happen to hit upon some other solution, because, as things have turned out, it may look to you as if I had presumed too much upon the probability of your

accepting my second offer. Nothing could be further from the truth, I assure you ; and I need hardly say that I never imagined that any account of the transaction would reach your ears.'

'I should have thought you must have known that Léon has no secrets from me. But that does not much matter. In any case, I must have been told before the money could have been paid.'

'I had hoped that, as there need be no actual transfer of coin, he and I would have been able to arrange the matter without troubling you about it. But, to tell you the truth, mademoiselle, I did not give much thought to the details ; as I told you before, the debt is a purely imaginary one.'

Jeanne bit her lip. Believing, as she did, that her present unlucky plight was the result of a deliberate plan laid by Saint-Luc, it cost her an effort to refrain from openly charging him with needless duplicity. Nothing could justify his behaviour ; but if he had thrown himself upon her mercy, pleading his love for her as his excuse, he might perhaps have been allowed the benefit of an extenuating circumstance. As it was, there was nothing to be said for him.

'I do not understand how a debt can be imaginary,' she answered coldly. 'If Léon lost the money to you, he owes it to you, and will pay it. Let us treat it simply as a matter of business if you please. I am not quite certain as to what legal rights our marriage may give you over my property, and it is not desirable that anyone but ourselves should know of this unfortunate business. I desire, therefore, to have your solemn assurance that you give up all claim to 255,800 francs of my dowry.'

The business like air with which this very unbusiness-like demand was enunciated might have provoked Saint-Luc to a smile if he had not been too much hurt to see the comical side of the situation.

'I pledge you my word of honour, mademoiselle, that it shall be so,' he said ; 'and I will bind myself by an oath if you feel any fear of my robbing you. But, believe me, you are attaching a great deal too much importance to a stupid blunder. Will you permit me to give you my version of the story ?'

'No, thank you. I have your promise that you will not oppose my handing over the requisite sum to Léon, and that is sufficient. I do not wish to hear another word about the matter.

'Very well. I also should be glad to let the whole thing be forgotten, only I fancied you were blaming me——'

‘I am blaming nobody,’ interrupted Jeanne, with sudden irritability. ‘Pray do not harp upon it; let us talk of something else.’

Saint-Luc did not press the point. In spite of Jeanne’s assurances, he perceived plainly that he was being condemned unheard; but he was content to waive his right of self-defence in deference to the will which was henceforth to be his law. Deliberately, and of his own choice, he bowed his neck beneath the yoke, saying, with a smile—

‘As you please. I will never say or do anything that is disagreeable to you, if I can avoid it,’ and then began to talk about the Governor-General’s ball.

If Madame de Trémonville could have been present in the spirit—if she could have seen her silent partner of the previous evening putting forth all his conversational powers in the vain effort to interest his indifferent hearer, and Jeanne scarcely so much as pretending to listen to him—she would have felt that her prophetic sketch of Mademoiselle de Mersac’s married life was justified before the event, and her respectful admiration for M. de Saint-Luc would probably have suffered some diminution. Who, indeed, respects humility in this world? The virtue is so rare a one that most people fail to recognise it when they see it, and usually set it down as one of the meaner vices. It must be admitted that Jeanne, who ought perhaps to have known better, was in no wise propitiated by her lover’s submissiveness. She did not understand that it was an exaggerated sense of his own unworthiness that made Saint-Luc mentally prostrate himself before her; she saw only the ignoble, crouching attitude, and trod him under foot without compunction.

‘Why will you insist upon it that I am always in the right?’ she exclaimed once, rather cruelly. ‘Surely I must be wrong sometimes! Let us try to discover some point upon which we can differ, or we shall never agree.’

But this was some days later, after Jeanne had had to put up with a long course of unbroken acquiescence. Upon this first afternoon she bore two hours of Saint-Luc’s society without open murmuring, and suffered him to depart at last with no worse punishment than a somewhat curt dismissal.

‘It is time for me to go and dress for dinner,’ she said. ‘I suppose you will be coming here every day now. I am always busy in the morning, but after three o’clock you will generally find me disengaged. Good-bye.’

CHAPTER XIX.

JEANNE QUARRELS WITH FANCHETTE, AND LÉON SINGS THE
'MARSEILLAISE.'

HUMAN nature, even in its moods of highest self-abnegation, is still apt to retain a sufficient remnant of love for self to long for the applause or gratitude of fellow-mortals. Curtius, when he resolved upon immolating himself upon the altar of patriotism, arrayed himself, it will be remembered, in a suit of shining armour, mounted a prancing war-horse, and disappeared into the gulf with the eyes of the awe-struck citizens upon him, and their murmurs of mingled admiration and pity in his ears. The sacrifice would have been equally efficacious, it is to be presumed, and the chasm as permanently closed, if he had walked quietly down to it, after nightfall, and slipped in, without saying a word to anybody. But he probably felt himself entitled to a more dramatic ending, and who shall blame him? Damon, waiting on the scaffold for the tardy Pythias, while the headsman stood by his side and the last sands ran out of the hour-glass, was a spectacle so sublime that the tyrant Dionysius is said to have been moved by it to make one of the silliest requests ever recorded in history or fiction. Had Damon risked his life in some commonplace manner, such as dragging his friend out of a duckpond, he would not have been sublime at all, and would, therefore, have been the more heroic; while, if he had smilingly espoused a hideous heiress in order to pay Pythias's gambling debts, he would have accomplished a feat unsurpassed in the annals of friendship or love. There is no sacrifice so great but that gratitude will render it bearable, and none too small to be magnified into a burden by absence of recognition. Jeanne de Mersac, who was about to lay down her life for her brother in a sense which, without any figure of speech, was far more terrible to her than death, could not but feel it no slight addition to her unhappiness that he should be precluded from appreciating her devotion. It was, of course, inevitable that he should be kept in ignorance of the motives which had actuated her in accepting M. de Saint-Luc; but there was little consolation in that thought; and, moreover, Jeanne could have found it in her heart to wish that he should at least have guessed at what seemed so obvious, were it only that she might have had

the satisfaction of quieting his fears. But he apparently felt no anxiety, and, at all events, did not display any. As far as his sister could understand his feelings, he was satisfied with the arrangement, though not overjoyed at it, and desirous chiefly to avoid meeting Saint-Luc, or mentioning his name.

It was, perhaps, in some degree through Jeanne's own fault that a certain coolness and estrangement sprang up at this time between her and her brother. She informed him of her engagement briefly and without comment, speaking in a certain cold, matter-of-fact voice, the sound of which was well known to Léon, and which had, from his boyhood up, always had the effect of overawing him. He looked surprised, but did not say very much in reply; nor was it until Jeanne had begun to talk about something else that he remarked hesitatingly—

‘I thought, after what you said the other day about Saint-Luc——’

‘Never mind what I said the other day,’ she interrupted. ‘I was in a romantic mood the other day—I am not often in a romantic mood, am I?—and I daresay I talked a good deal of nonsense. I told you that I would not marry M. de Saint-Luc because I did not love him; but now I think that objection need not stand in my way. If I could have loved him it would have been better; but as I cannot, I must be satisfied with knowing that my marriage with him will be a good thing in other ways.’

Léon ought undoubtedly to have inquired in what ways, but he did not. He contented himself with murmuring something about Saint-Luc's excellent qualities, and almost immediately Jeanne left him. How far he was aware of the true causes of his sister's change of opinion it would be difficult to say; probably he managed to persuade himself that his own embarrassed position was only one of them.

Partly from a long-standing habit of acquiescence in all Jeanne's decisions, partly because it was so very desirable that she should marry Saint-Luc, and partly because he really believed that such a marriage would tend to secure her own happiness, he refrained from asking further questions, and dismissed the subject from his mind with an inward declaration that everything had happened for the best.

All this did not, however, prevent him from feeling guilty and uncomfortable in his sister's company, nor her from noticing his altered manner, and resenting it; and as Jeanne, for all her self-possession, was no adept at concealing her dis-

pleasure from those whom she loved, home soon became rather a dreary place to the young Marquis, who liked laughter and soft speeches, and pleasant, smiling faces to welcome him, and who had been so accustomed all his life to these agreeable surroundings that he had come to look upon them almost as his right. The upshot of it was that he absented himself as frequently and for as long periods as he was able.

Thus Jeanne found that she must bear her burden in solitude, or in society that was worse than solitude. M. de Fontvieille, good man, had been a little shocked by the precipitancy with which his philosophical teaching had been acted upon. He would have preferred that Jeanne should have consecrated at least a year to tears and regret; and though he was always kind to her in a fussy, rather troublesome way, made no further allusion to sentimental topics. The Duchess, excited, talkative, and gleeful, was a very trying companion; and M. de Saint-Luc was simply intolerable. To escape from him now became the chief aim of Jeanne's life. She had a hundred excuses for being out when he called, or for leaving him soon after his arrival. Her wedding had been fixed to take place in the beginning of September, and the necessity for supervising the progress of her *trousseau* afforded her a pretext for constantly escaping to the convent of El Biar or to the school for Arab girls in the town, to neither of which establishments were gentlemen admitted.

Upon occasions, however, she was compelled to sit through a long *tête-à-tête* with her future husband, and then that unlucky scapegoat had a troublous time of it. Never was man more persistently snubbed, more pitilessly disdained; and never was unmerited cruelty more patiently borne.

When nature is asked to carry a heavier weight than her strength is equal to, the habitual qualities which make up a human character are apt to give way in one place or another. The generous are not always generous, nor the just always just. Great men have often stooped to mean actions, and good men to heartless ones, thereby sorely perplexing their biographers, who seem to think that inconsistency requires some explanation. In the everlasting fight between the good and evil parts of our nature, the victory, even in the best of us, cannot always be for the right side.

Long afterwards, Jeanne, looking back upon those sultry summer weeks during which she had stood with her back to the wall, fighting against despair—looking back, and viewing

men and events in the changed light which time had thrown upon them—knew not which to wonder at most, her own unremitting virulence or Saint-Luc's forbearing gentleness. She had learnt then to appreciate that kind, faithful heart, and could never think of the remorseless stabs which she had inflicted upon it without an aching pain at her own. Even at the time her conscience smote her occasionally when her victim winced under her sharp speeches—for, after all, it is but poor sport to attack one who will not retaliate—but if she relented at all, it was only after his back was turned. The sound of his step in the hall was sufficient to chase away any rising compassion from her breast.

'*C'est plus fort que moi,*' she said one day, in answer to a remonstrance from Fanchette, who had overheard part of a conversation between the betrothed couple, and who was in the habit of using an old servant's privilege of speaking plainly to her mistress when so minded. 'I do not want to be rude—I despise myself for being rude—but help it I cannot. He irritates my nerves beyond all bearing. I sit still and listen to him as long as I can ; I bite my tongue to make it keep silent ; and then at last he gives me an opportunity of saying something that I know will hurt his feelings ; and I feel that I must say it or die.'

The old woman held up her wrinkled hands in amazement.

'I do not recognise you, Jeanne,' she exclaimed. 'You to take a delight in hurting another's feelings!—it is not like you. And that poor gentleman, too, who is so good—so generous——'

'Generous?' interrupted Jeanne, with a short laugh. 'Oh, if he has been generous to you, Fanchette, you have, of course, good reason for liking him. He has never given me any money, you see, so that he has not the same claim upon my gratitude.'

'He has given you his heart, which is worth more than money,' cried the old nurse, reddening. 'And it is not at my age, and after thirty years of service in one family, that I should be accused of taking bribes, mademoiselle. And a pair of spectacles is not money, even if they be mounted in gold. Never, since I have been in this house, has any gentleman dared to offer me a present, except as a mark of esteem. Money, indeed ! I have money of my own in the bank, as you know very well ; and I could treat myself to fifty pairs of spectacles to-morrow without being ruined, if I felt so inclined.'

Decidedly, Jeanne, you are losing your head if you believe that old friends and honest folks are capable of such baseness.' And Fanchette hobbled off in deep dudgeon.

Poor Jeanne was like a wounded animal ; her first impulse was to turn upon those who laid a finger upon her hurts, and she could not always restrain herself from yielding to it. Her temper at this time was certainly not angelic ; but the worst that could have been said of her has now been said. No one, except Saint-Luc, had much cause to complain of her conduct. Outsiders remarked no change in her, unless it were a slight increase of taciturnity, nor was it generally suspected that she was otherwise than satisfied with her destiny. The good sisters at the convent, in whose cool parlour she spent a great part of her days, thought her softened and improved ; the little colony of poor and sick people whom she visited as usual rejoiced in the receipt of an increased bounty, and united in shrill lamentations over the too probable departure of their benefactress ; the children at the Arab school lifted their little brown faces from their work and showed their white teeth when the beautiful, tall lady over whose *trousseau* they were busy came in, bringing the bag of bonbons which they had learned to expect with her.

With all these worthy people, who were not of her world, Jeanne could get on well enough ; but to receive the congratulations of her friends, to reply to their inquisitive questionings and parry their amiable innuendoes, was less easy.

The story of Léon's gambling *fiasco* had leaked out, as such stories will do, and, in a more or less garbled form, had reached the ears of nearly all his acquaintances. Of these, some few were content to shrug their shoulders, remark that the young fellow was going to the devil, as they had always said he would, and to greet Saint-Luc with the additional respect due to a man of such evident ability ; but the majority, and especially the old ladies, were not going to let so delicious a bit of scandal die out without examining into its details. Taking the news of Léon's heavy losses in conjunction with that of his sister's engagement to the winner, they were unanimously of opinion that there was more in it all than met the eye ; and, further, that the subject was one which demanded, and would repay, careful sifting. Their congratulatory visits, therefore, were marked by sundry hints and insinuations which mystified the Duchess while they greatly alarmed Jeanne, in whom an incapacity for prevarication and a fine belief in the wickedness of lying had been

implanted by her father, much to her subsequent inconvenience.

That the gossips would ere long have wormed the truth out of her is beyond a doubt, had not Saint-Luc luckily got wind of their suspicions and taken prompt measures to suppress them. He, poor fellow, had lived in a society which takes broad views of morality, and he had no scruple whatever in seeking out those old ladies, questioning them as to the information they had received, and meeting their statements with a categorical denial. He then went to M. de Monceaux, and made use of such brief and pithy arguments as to convince that gentleman that his life depended upon his contradiction of the reports which he admitted having had some share in spreading. De Monceaux made a wry face, but as he was always willing to oblige a friend in an inexpensive way, and, besides, infinitely preferred eating his words to being run through the body, he took occasion to pay a round of visits on the following day, and to mention, in the course of conversation, that he had been made the victim of a foolish hoax in the matter of young de Mersac's supposed losses—the stakes being, in reality, payable in *sous* and not in napoleons, as had been pretended.

Among those who experienced a natural feeling of disappointment at this announcement was Madame de Trémonville, whom De Monceaux met at her door in the act of alighting from her carriage. She had just returned from the Campagne de Mersac, whither she had betaken herself primed with acid-sweet congratulations, only to be refused admittance, and was consequently in no mood to wish her neighbours well.

'A hoax?' she repeated incredulously, when De Monceaux had concluded his brief explanation. 'That sounds very improbable. Why should they have wished to make you think that they were playing for gold instead of copper?'

'Oh, as for that, I was not the only one taken in,' replied De Monceaux, with ready mendacity. 'De Mersac himself fully believed at the time that he was ruined; and a fine fright he had. It was Saint-Luc who contrived to deceive him about the stakes, and to make him suppose that he had lost about four hundred times as much as he really had. His object was to induce the young fellow to renounce gambling by showing him what it might lead him to, as the Spartans used to exhibit a drunken man to their sons, by way of disgusting them with intemperance. And I understand that he has succeeded.'

'What kindness! and what morality! M. de Saint-Luc is

really becoming too good for the society of such sinners as you and I. And to think that his pupil has also been mine!—with a difference. For while he has been striving to wean the poor little Marquis from the amusements of this life, I have been doing my small best to introduce him to them.’

‘Saint-Luc has more than once, in my presence, warned young De Mersac against the dangers of this house,’ observed M. de Monceaux, remembering that he owed his friend one. ‘I fear that you will lose your pupil, madame.’

‘You think so?’ returned Madame de Trémonville, with a scornful laugh. ‘Stay and dine with us, and I flatter myself that before the evening is over you will have changed your mind. The Marquis makes his appearance in the drawing-room as punctually as the coffee. To tell the truth, I was beginning to find him terribly wearisome, and was thinking of giving him his *congé*; but since M. de Saint-Luc permits himself to caution people against visiting me, I shall let him see that my friends come here when I please, and as often as I please.’

‘Non vides quanto moveas periclo,
Pyrre, Gætulæ catulos lænæ?’

murmured De Monceaux, as he followed the little lady into the hall. He added aloud, ‘Madame, no one knows better than I do that you are irresistible, but is it worth while to waste your time in making a slave of a raw lad? I can answer for one full-grown man who requires no persuasion to cast himself at your feet, and who—’

‘It will be worth while if it amuses me,’ interrupted Madame de Trémonville, disregarding this flattering avowal. But she meant that it would be worth while if it annoyed Saint-Luc.

M. de Monceaux cared very little whether Léon were subjugated or no; but he liked a good dinner, and knew that Madame de Trémonville had a *chef* (passing rich upon thirty pounds a year) whom many a London club might have envied. Moreover, he thought it more than likely that a game of *baccarat* would be proposed before the evening was at an end, and *baccarat* was a form of gambling which usually brought him luck.

As the dinner-hour drew near, three young officers, evidently *habitués* of the house, entered; and shortly afterwards the whole party sat down to table, without waiting for M. de Trémonville, who had not yet returned from his bureau.

‘My husband is very busy just now,’ the lady of the house remarked casually, as she finished her soup. ‘One can never

tell at what hour he may come in. For the last three days he has been perpetually receiving and sending off telegrams. By-the-by, messieurs, I hope you are all fond of Rhine wine, for I think you will drink very little else this autumn.'

'Bah! there will be no war,' said one of the officers.

'And why not, pray?' asked Madame de Trémonville, smiling in the superior fashion of one behind the scenes.

'Firstly, because I have no luck; secondly, because the Prussians are not ready; and thirdly, because it is impossible to declare war without a pretext. Besides the Emperor is growing old, and the Mexican affair has damped his ardour for glory. We have already inflicted a humiliation upon the Prussians by making them withdraw their Prince Leopold, and, for my part, I scarcely see what more we should gain by a successful campaign.'

'Prestige, and the left bank of the Rhine,' answered M. de Monceaux, holding up his wine to the glow of the sunset.

'The revenge of Sadowa,' said another.

'And of Nikolsburg,' added a third.

'You none of you understand the situation,' said Madame de Trémonville. 'If the Emperor declares war, it will not be for the sake of glory or prestige—France has enough of both—nor to avenge fancied slights, nor even to rectify the eastern frontier—though that may become a political necessity—but to ensure peace. The Empire is peace; the country desires peace. We shall have it; but to obtain it we must make up our minds to pass through a short struggle. When our victorious armies enter Berlin, the tranquillity of Europe will be assured for the next half-century.'

Madame de Trémonville was as ignorant of the history of past campaigns as she was of politics and of the art of war; but she was not more ignorant than the newspaper writers from whom she derived her information, such as it was; and, in common with the immense majority of her compatriots, she had a blind confidence in the reigning dynasty. 'As for a pretext,' she resumed, 'that is easily found; and if we cannot discover one, we shall take the liberty of going to war without any. War is unavoidable, and we must take advantage of the first favourable moment to declare it.'

'Ah, there is the question,' remarked the officer who had spoken first. 'Is the present moment a favourable one for us?'

Madame de Trémonville turned upon him with sovereign contempt. 'Monsieur de Marcy, said she, 'do you take his

Majesty the Emperor for an imbecile? Is it likely that he would declare war if he were not sure of success?’

‘War is not yet declared,’ said De Monceaux; ‘and I confess that I am a little of M. de Marcy’s opinion. I think the Government will be satisfied with having given King William a slap in the face, and will go no further. I believe we are a match for the Prussians; but they are good soldiers, and Berlin is a long way from Paris, and we have no allies.’

‘No allies?’ cried Madame de Trémonville. ‘Wait a little. I know from a sure source that Austria will join us as soon as the first shot is fired. Bavaria and Würtemberg, who can put some 80,000 men into the field between them, must follow suit. In this way Prussia, with an army of something like 700,000 men, including the reserves, will be hemmed in by forces amounting in all to 1,600,000; that is to say, that she will be outnumbered in the proportion of considerably more than two to one. If you think that is not enough to put King William back in his place, I will throw you in Hanover, who has been awaiting her opportunity for four years past.’

These imposing figures did not fail to produce their effect upon the company, no member of which had sufficient knowledge of his own to verify or dispute them; and Madame de Trémonville, having secured the respectful attention of her audience, went on to expatiate upon the probable future policy of the conquering Emperor. With her enemies crushed, with the temporal power of the Pope assured, with religion freed from disturbing influences, and the machinations of disaffected plotters rendered abortive by the contentment of the nation, France would be at liberty to devote herself to the fulfilment of her destiny—that of leading the world in the path of civilisation. The standing army might be reduced, taxation diminished, and a new era of government, combining the blessings of constitutional freedom with those of order and discipline, inaugurated. Under the benevolent sway of a dynasty secure alike against aggression abroad and treason at home, industry would take a fresh start, science would be encouraged, the arts fostered, and, lastly, a Court would gather at the Tuileries which for brilliancy, refinement, and elegance would surpass any known to history or tradition. Madame de Trémonville waxed so enthusiastic over this portion of her subject that she pursued it without intermission until dinner was at an end, and carried it with her into the drawing-room afterwards. She was predicting the speedy advent of a

somewhat equivocal millennium when the entrance of Léon diverted her thoughts into another channel, and recalled her to actualities.

‘How late you are!’ she cried, greeting the infatuated youth with a reproachful look which set his silly heart beating.

‘On the contrary, madame, I am ten minutes before my usual time,’ he answered innocently.

‘But when I tell you that you are late! Do you not know, M. de Mersac, that a well-bred man never contradicts a lady? You are unpardonably rude this evening.’

‘Madame, I apologise most humbly.’

‘On your knees, then, or I will not forgive you.’

The young idiot actually plumped down upon his knees in the middle of the room, and Madame de Trémonville, darting a mischievous glance over her shoulder at De Monceaux, gravely accorded the desired pardon.

But we must have no disloyal subjects here this evening,’ she added. ‘When you came in, M. le Marquis, we were discussing the prospects of war. At such a time as this you must waive considerations of party, and cry “*Vive l’Empereur*,” or we shall send you home again.’

‘Madame!——’

‘Do as I command you, or retire. Our patriotism will be content with nothing less.’

‘*Vive l’Empereur!*’ ejaculated Léon in such lugubrious accents that there was a general outburst of laughter.

‘Bravo!’ cried Madame de Trémonville, patting him approvingly on the shoulder. ‘You have said your lesson well, and you shall have your reward. I will sing to you, and you shall turn over my music for me.’

What fascination was there about this vulgar little woman that could induce Léon, who, after all, was a gentleman, though a foolish one, to parade his subjection to her in so public a fashion? There is no answer to such questions; but the phenomena which suggest them may be witnessed any day nearer home than Algeria. The young marquis was not the first man who, falling a victim to the enchantments of this Circe, had been forced by her to exhibit himself to the world in a shape half melancholy, half contemptible. It soothed her self-love to see her admirers grovelling before her; and on this particular evening, the boast which she had made to De Monceaux caused her to be more capricious and imperious than usual. She made Léon fetch and carry for her like a dog;

she bullied and petted him by turns; and to show his perfect docility, ordered him first to sing 'Partant pour la Syrie,' which he did with a very bad grace, and then to read aloud a newspaper article in which a lively historical parallel was drawn between the Comte de Chambord and Rip van Winkle.

It was an exhibition of much the same nature as may be seen in any travelling menagerie. An elephant balancing his unwieldy body upon an inverted tub, firing a pistol with his trunk, and raising himself clumsily upon his hind legs is not a beautiful, an imposing, or even a comical spectacle; but there are people who think such sights worth paying for, and De Monceaux was very well amused by Léon's performance, though the other young men, who all this time were left to entertain one another, thought it a trifle tedious.

A diversion was at length created by the appearance of M. de Trémonville, who walked into the room looking tired and harassed, and with no trace of his customary smiling, official sleekness about him.

'Messieurs,' said he, taking off his spectacles and rubbing them slowly with his silk pocket-handkerchief, 'I bring you the news of the declaration of war.'

A volley of exclamations and questions greeted this announcement. Everybody began to speak at once. When had the news arrived? Was it certainly true? Had France or Prussia declared war? What was the cause assigned?—and so forth. When M. de Trémonville could get a hearing, he satisfied the impatience of his questioners to the best of his ability. The Governor-General had received a telegram announcing that the King of Prussia having refused to give audience to M. Benedetti, diplomatic relations between the two countries had been broken off, and that an aide-de-camp was now on his way to Berlin with the formal declaration of war. The Chasseurs d'Afrique were under orders to proceed immediately to France, and other regiments were to follow as soon as transports could be got ready to embark them. The Governor-General himself was to take command of an army corps, and would probably leave in the course of a few days. It was said that the Emperor would assume the command-in-chief in person. M. de Trémonville communicated all this intelligence soberly, almost dolorously, for the turn that affairs had taken inspired him with some anxiety. He was not a specially far-sighted man, but he had a keen eye to his own interests, and he perceived that, whatever brilliant prospects

an appeal to arms might hold out to military men, it could offer none whatever to bureaucrats. To the latter class victory would bring no advancement, whereas a disaster, which would undoubtedly hurl the Emperor Napoleon from his throne, would only too certainly sweep away a large proportion of his civilian employés with him. '*C'est fâcheux*,' murmured M. de Trémonville in conclusion, as he rubbed his spectacles.

But nobody paid any attention to him—least of all his wife. That patriotic lady had seated herself before the piano, and now, after striking a few stirring chords, broke forth into the first words of the Marseillaise. Her shrill voice rang through the house—

Allons enfants de la patrie,
Le jour de gloire est arrivé !

'Join, all of you, at the end of the verse,' she cried ; and her enthusiasm gained the company. They arranged themselves in a group behind her, and presently the ears of the passers-by on the high road caught the first sound of a chorus which was soon to become very familiar to them—

Aux armes, citoyens !
Formez vos bataillons.

Léon, to whom this revolutionary song was anathema—M. de Monceaux, who was past the age for enthusiasm—Madame de Trémonville, who in her heart cared for neither dynasty, nor country, nor any person or thing except herself, all forgot themselves in a sudden access of exaltation, and sang at the highest pitch of their voices, concluding with a tremendous shout of '*Vive la France !*'

Meanwhile, M. de Trémonville, unmoved in the midst of all this excitement, continued to rub his spectacles in the corner where he was seated apart, murmuring '*C'est fâcheux*.'

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE ROAD TO LA TRAPPE.

WE all know now that the war of 1870 was undertaken in opposition to the wishes of a vast majority of the French people. That fact, whatever it may be worth has been conclusively

established by the reports of the different Prefects since made public, and no one any longer dreams of disputing it. Whether any conceivable war, just or unjust, necessary or unnecessary, would not, in these days, be unwelcome to the larger portion of any civilised community, and whether, in the case of the Franco-German war, the discontent of the population was founded upon selfish or upon patriotic and moral considerations, are questions which admit of discussion; but it may safely be asserted that a stranger who should have happened to find himself in France during the days immediately preceding the outbreak of hostilities, and who should have endeavoured to gauge the temper of the people by the evidence of his own senses, would have been a man of no ordinary penetration if he had discovered that the coming conflict was in any special sense an unpopular one.

If, here and there, a bureaucrat, like M. de Trémonville, shook his head, or a shopkeeper or two sighed, or a merchant looked grave, it was not that their minds were harassed by doubts as to whether an attack upon Prussia were justifiable or no; and such isolated persons were hardly distinguishable among the crowds that thronged the cafés, night and day, haranguing, cheering and toasting the success of the army, or paraded the streets in gangs, while they bawled out patriotic songs with more of unanimity than of unison. Indeed, what with those whose enthusiasm was aroused by the gentle stimulus of official promptings, what with the idlers who are ever attracted by the sight of regiments on the march towards the frontier, and what with a certain number of honest folks who, to use the words of Uncle Toby, believed that this war was ‘but the getting together of quiet and harmless people, with their swords in their hands, to keep the ambitious and the turbulent within bounds,’ there was no lack of citizens ready to do the requisite amount of shouting.

Even in Algiers, where republicanism was tolerably strong, and where the plébiscite of May had revealed the existence of a growing dislike to the established form of government, there were no public demonstrations save such as were of a war-like kind. Farewell dinners and eloquent speeches were not wanting; the newspapers forgot their political differences while publishing denunciations of the infamous Bismarck, relating startling anecdotes bearing upon his private life and that of his royal master, and predicting the speedy discomfiture of the barbarian host; and every day an assemblage composed of

all classes of the inhabitants collected upon the quays to see the last of the homeward-bound regiments, and to raise a parting cheer as the huge transports glided slowly out to sea, with flags flying and bands playing. It is true that a great many of these worthy people afterwards averred that they had deprecated from the outset a war dictated solely by aims of selfish ambition ; but they disguised their feelings very successfully at the time.

In the midst of all this bustle and excitement the Algerian world almost forgot Mademoiselle de Mersac's approaching marriage. Congratulatory visits ceased ; the tongues of the gossips busied themselves with other topics ; even in the bride-elect's own household the coming event was less spoken of than Marshal Leboeuf's plan and the unexpected defection of the South-German states. To Jeanne this was an immense relief ; and a still greater was a slackening in the attentions of M. de Saint-Luc, who at this time was much occupied in bidding adieu to old friends and comrades, and in watching, a little wistfully, their departure to take part in the great game of which he could now only be a spectator, and who was seldom able to leave the town before nightfall. Even when he did come, he could talk of nothing but the war, the prospect of a rising among the more turbulent of the Arab tribes, and the appearance of the troops who were being hurried out of the colony. And so long as he confined himself to such subjects as these, he was as pleasant a companion as anyone else, and a more intelligent one than the generality.

At length the last of the transports cleared out of the harbour ; the streets were no longer blocked by out-going regiments and long trains of baggage-waggon ; Zouaves, Turcos, Linesmen, Chasseurs d'Afrique, and Spahis, all were gone ; and the town resumed its normal aspect, and more than its normal quiet. Then came a week of suspense, which developed into a vague uneasiness, as day succeeded to day, and no news arrived from the seat of war, except some uncertain rumours as to the disposition of the forces. M. de Fontvieille began to grumble. 'This Emperor inspires me with no confidence,' he said. 'Why does he stay in Paris instead of joining his army ? His uncle would have been across the Rhine before now.'

In due time, however, came tidings of the affair of Saarbrück, magnified, in the course of transmission, into a decisive victory ; and then the croakers were put to silence, and the timid reassured.

It was Léon who, radiant with joy, brought the newspaper containing this good news to El Biar, and read it out in the stable-yard, while Jeanne, who had been holding a conference with Pierre Cauvin, peeped over his shoulder, and the Arab grooms and helpers suspended their work to listen. ‘*Louis a reçu son baptême de feu.*’ It was the Emperor’s despatch that he read—that despatch which has been chuckled over by every fool in Christendom, and which has been quoted over and over again—for no very apparent reason—as an example of empty bombast. I don’t know that anybody thought it specially ridiculous at the time. Certainly Léon’s small audience did not.

‘We begin well,’ said the young man complacently, folding up the paper and replacing it in his pocket. ‘M. de Fontvieille will believe now that the Emperor knows what he is about.’

‘A man may be a bad ruler and a good soldier, I suppose,’ remarked Jeanne. ‘Let us hope that it is so in his case, and that he may finish this war as soon as possible. It is horrible to think that no victory can be won without thousands of homes being made miserable.’

‘Thousands of people die every day in their beds,’ said Léon. ‘There will always be plenty of misery so long as the world lasts; and what happier end could a man wish for than to be killed in battle? I am not sure that war is an unmixed evil.’

‘The good God would not have permitted war to exist if there were not some necessity for it,’ put in Pierre Cauvin, piously. ‘It is sad to think of the poor folks whose crops are destroyed by the armies; but if they lose, others gain—particularly those who have horses to sell. There is no beast in M. le Marquis’ stable that I could not dispose of for the *remonte*, to-morrow, at the price of 800 francs.’

‘A propos,’ said Léon, ‘I had a letter this morning from Mr. Barrington, to whom I had written, forwarding him the price of the horse which he had left here to be sold. Unfortunately I took the first good offer I had for him. If I had only foreseen that we should have war, I should not have parted with him so readily. However, Mr. Barrington seems satisfied. He writes in a very friendly way, and sends his congratulations to you and Saint-Luc. And now I think of it, there was an enclosure for you, which I must have put somewhere,’ continued this exasperating young man, searching vainly in all his pockets—‘unless I have torn it up by mistake, or dropped it. Oh, here it is.’

Jeanne took her letter with an unmoved countenance, and presently carried it, still unopened, indoors with her.

I hope nobody will think the worse of Jeanne because it must be recorded of her that, as soon as she had put four solid stone walls between her and the outer world, she took Barrington's letter out of its envelope and kissed it before reading it. No doubt she forgot her self-respect and her duty to her affianced husband in so doing ; but it must be remembered that she was quite alone at the time—which, as everyone will allow, makes a difference. If a prying *diable boiteux* could look in upon us, and exhibit us to our friends at such times as we deemed ourselves most secure from observation, should we not be fortunate indeed to escape conviction of any worse sin than that of raising a sheet of note-paper to our lips ? Moreover, Jeanne did not consider her love for Barrington a sin at all, but at the most a humiliation—a weakness to be concealed from the world at large, not by any means to be cast out from her heart, supposing that to be possible. How she arranged matters with the Curé of El Biar, to whom she confessed her peccadilloes with devout regularity and without conscious reservation, I don't know. Possibly she may not have thought it incumbent upon her to inform that holy man of matters which, to her mind, did not come within the category of offences against God or man.

So she kissed the unconscious sheet, and sighed over it, and then read it.

The letter was as little worthy of so much honour as its writer was of the heart he had won ; but who or what gets rigid justice in this chaotic world ? Barrington wrote much as he spoke—easily, fluently, without much consideration, and thinking, all the time, rather of himself than of the person whom he addressed. His composition—a somewhat diffuse one—was well-worded, and not devoid of a certain sentimental grace of diction ; but it breathed of self in every line. While penning it, he had been smarting under a genuine and heartfelt sense of injury. In so far as it was given to him to love anyone, he had loved, and did love Jeanne. He had felt tolerably certain, too, that his love was returned ; and as soon as he had rallied from the first shock produced upon his mind by Léon's intelligence, he had had little difficulty in persuading himself that he had been jilted. To a man of his temperament such a conviction was almost more painful than the bereavement which it implied. 'Now that I have said all that good manners require in the way of congratulations,' he wrote, 'I may

perhaps be allowed to cast aside conventionality for a few minutes, and to confess candidly that the announcement of your engagement to M. de Saint-Luc seems to me too terrible to have any foundation in reality. It is so few weeks since my own eyes and ears convinced me of your positive dislike to this man that I can hardly bring myself to believe in your having, of your own free will, chosen him to be your husband. The whole business strikes me as so preposterous that, as I sit writing here in my club in London, I keep asking myself whether the gloomy stillness of this big room, the rattle of the cabs outside, the peculiar, all-pervading London smell of smoke and stables and the gleam of sallow sunlight which falls upon my paper, and upon your brother's letter lying open before me, are not part and parcel of some horrid dream, and whether I shall not presently awake to see the glorious African sun streaming through my *persiennes*, and hear the shrill "Arri!—ar-r-i!" of my old friends the donkey-drivers, and those plaintive, drawling street-cries of the Arabs, which used to rouse me every morning in dear old Algiers. Or is London the reality, and Algiers the dream? I begin to suspect that my life there was nothing else. Of the happy illusions, the groundless fancies, the foolish hopes which I built up for myself in that delicious dreamland, I had, perhaps, better not speak. They are all fading away fast now, dispersed by the pitiless palpable presence of that letter, dated "Campagne de Mersac, Algiers," which stares me in the face, and will not be ignored. I suppose I ought not to complain. No man has a right to expect more than a certain meed of happiness, and perhaps I have had my share. And memory, at least, remains to me, and can never be taken from me. Memory, which restores to us all that is sweet and beautiful in the past, without its anxieties and petty cares—the roses without the thorns; the sunshine without the rain. Memory, which in this world of constant change and decay, is a more real and permanent friend than happiness. Memory, which'—&c., &c. There was a good deal more of this kind of thing. The writer, losing himself gradually in the mists of a complacent sentimentalism, wandered further and further from his point, and entirely forgot his original intention of piercing Jeanne's faithless breast by thrusts of polished sarcasm. He wound up, quite contentedly, at length with a poetical, but rather obscure paragraph, the import of which appeared to be that, miserable though he was above all other men, yet his sensibility and culture were such

that he could draw from affliction's self sources of delight undreamt of by less refined natures.

To Jeanne, who understood but very imperfectly the character of the man whom she loved, all this poor stuff was the most pathetic eloquence. Her own character was drawn in clear, firm, decided lines, and had none of the shifting shades and gradations which enabled Barrington to look at a subject from fifty different points of view, and to change his mode of action with reference to it a dozen times in as many hours. Black was black to her, and white, white. If Barrington's letter did not mean that he loved her, and that he saw she did not love Saint-Luc, what did it mean? At that moment it was as clear as daylight to her that she had made a terrible mistake; and she could not help asking herself whether, even now, it were an irreparable one. Her first duty, she conceived, was to save Léon; but if she could accomplish this end as well by marrying Barrington as by marrying Saint-Luc, she would throw over the latter unhesitatingly. The difficulty was that Barrington not having avowed his love in so many words, and it being impossible for her to let him understand that he might venture to do so, she could not free herself from her present entanglement without risk of bringing about her brother's ruin. She sat chafing under the weight of the chains which she had forged for herself, and seeking vainly for some means of breaking them, till she could bear the confinement of the house no longer; and putting on her hat and gloves, went back to the stable-yard, thinking that perchance some practical solution might suggest itself to her in the free open air.

The sight of her pony-chaise standing before the coachhouse put it into her head to take a drive out into the country, and she at once summoned a groom, and told him to put Caïd and Sheikh to. These were the same ponies which Saint-Luc had sold to Léon, upon such favourable terms for the purchaser, a few months before, and which she had for a long time refused to drive. Latterly she had taken to making use of them pretty frequently, it being no longer a matter of any importance whether or no they ought to be regarded in the light of a gift from their former owner. They were a good serviceable pair, not very taking to the eye, but willing and enduring, like all Arabs, and faster trotters than the generality of their race. Jeanne had put a good half mile of road between herself and home before she was well settled in her seat.

Westward she drove, along the hilly road which leads to

Koléhah, regardless of the sultry heat and blinding glare, urged on by the goad of her feverish regrets, and caring little whither she went, so that she were able to move swiftly. There was an oppressive hush and stillness in the atmosphere. Over the Atlas mountains, towards the south, brooded a sullen, coppery haze, veiling the snow; northward the sea heaved with a slow, glassy swell; the dusty olive trees that bordered the road, the creepers that hung among the cactus hedges—even the tough, sharp-pointed aloes themselves—seemed to droop and sicken under the fierce rays of the sun. Jeanne looked neither to right nor left; but whirled on through the choking dust and the hot simmering air, past parched fields and silent farmhouses, and many a dry ravine and stony watercourse; till, rattling through the village of Chéragas, where the white houses were all closely shuttered, and neither man nor beast was stirring, she emerged, at length, upon the upland of Staouéli, and the fertile acres surrounding the monastery of La Trappe.

This plain, once a sterile waste, has been rendered productive, after years of labour, by the monks, assisted by some Government subventions and private donations. All around their lonely dwelling the air is heavy with the perfume of the sweet geranium fields, which form one of their chief sources of revenue. From the sale of a scent distilled from these plants, from that of a liqueur manufactured on the premises, and from the produce of its own fields, orange groves, and orchards, the silent brotherhood is now able to support itself and to dispense a fairly large annual amount in charity. It is a community highly respected in the neighbourhood, living as hard and bitter a life as the most determined self-tormentor could wish for—but not a useless one.

The sight of the monastery—a long, low, whitewashed building, standing close to the road, and faced by a clump of stunted palms—reminded Jeanne that she had accomplished a distance of twelve kilometres without slackening speed—a fact to which the heaving flanks and streaming coats of her ponies added their mute testimony. She drew up in the shadow of a wall, and, dropping her reins, allowed the tired beasts to rest for a while.

Presently a lay brother waddled out, shading his eyes from the glare with his hand, and took a leisurely survey of the newcomer. He recognised Mademoiselle de Mersac, with whom he had had dealings from time to time on behalf of his Superiors, and welcomed her with all the warmth of a naturally garrulous

soul, whose lot had been cast by ironical destiny among the living dead. While the good man chattered about the crops and the prospects of a sirocco, and the news from the seat of war, and what not, sponging the horses' noses as he talked, and feeding them with slices of black bread, Jeanne let her eyes roam over the melancholy white façade of the building, wondering vaguely what manner of existence was led by the ghastly, mysterious figures whom it concealed, and almost finding it in her heart to envy them their immunity from all earthly cares and perplexities. In her present mood, she was inclined to under-rate physical suffering as compared with mental. There are people out in the world who undergo a daily penance as severe as that of La Trappe, and get no credit for it; a penance not of silence, but of speech—of forced smiles, of feigned sympathies, of perpetual righteous dissimulation. The monks at least have the consolation of working towards a definite end, and of seeing their reward draw nearer every day, she thought, remembering an inscription which she had noticed once before upon the wall of this same monastery, '*S'il est triste de vivre à La Trappe, qu'il est doux d'y mourir !*'

The words hung in her memory and haunted her, long after she had bidden farewell to her friend of the brown robe, and had set her face homewards again. To one so bewildered and unhappy as herself, death, indeed, appeared sweeter than life; and it was in all sincerity that she sighed out, 'Oh, if I could only get a sun-stroke or a fever and shake off all my troubles in that simple way, how glad and thankful I should be!'

It may perhaps be true that,

Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
No life that breathes with human breath
Has ever truly longed for death.

But Jeanne, at all events, thought she did so; and that, when you come to consider of it, is pretty nearly the same thing.

It is, however, one thing to desire dissolution in the abstract, and another to face the painful, sickening wrench with which body and soul are separated; and it so fell out that, very shortly after breathing the aspiration recorded above, our heroine had occasion to appreciate this distinction. For while, lost in her own sad thoughts, she hurried her steeds upon their homeward way, there met her suddenly, upon the brow of a hill, a long string of laden camels, moving slowly to the westward, their wild Arab drivers pacing beside them, and their black, misshapen

shadows thrown far beyond the road by the sinking sun. To the human eye nothing can be more pleasing than the quaint, unexpected pictures of desert life which thus start up, every now and again, in the midst of the European civilisation of Algiers; to the equine, nothing is more odious. I suppose that there are very few living horses, Arab or other, who can look with perfect equanimity upon a camel, which, in truth, when viewed in an impartial light, and divested of all traditional associations, is as hideous a brute, and as like the creation of a nightmare, as can well be conceived. Caïd, Jeanne's near pony, was a most worthy, well-meaning little beast free from any kind of vice, and, albeit of a somewhat nervous temperament, too conscious of the responsibilities which rested upon him when in harness to indulge in anything beyond a sober shy at the sight of donkeys, wheelbarrows, veiled Mauresques, and other spectacles of an alarming nature; but he drew the line at camels. In the presence of these ungainly monsters he lost all courage and self-respect, and became as one possessed; and now, perceiving the approach of his old enemies, he gave a snort, a plunge, and a swerve, which shook his driver roughly out of dreamland, and very nearly out of her seat into the bargain. She, resenting this abrupt show of insubordination, and acting upon the impulse of the moment, foolishly cut him sharply over the shoulder with her whip. That was final. Caïd flung up his heels, threw himself into his collar, and made a clean bolt for it. As for Sheikh, he, finding himself tearing along the road, willy-nilly, at the rate of an express train, naturally concluded that something very dreadful was the matter, and became as panic-stricken as his companion. And so, in the course of a few seconds, Jeanne came to a clear sense of the fact that she had lost all control over her horses. She twisted the reins round and round her hands, and pulled with all the force of a tolerably strong pair of arms; but she might as well have tugged at a stone wall. There was nothing for it but to sit still, and let the ponies run until they should be exhausted, or until something should stop them.

Jeanne did not like it. She knew that she was in imminent danger of being dashed, head first, against a road as hard as granite, and the prospect had nothing inviting for her. To be killed outright might be a blessing—though even that did not seem quite so clear as it had done five minutes before; but to be mangled, stunned, battered, to break an arm or a leg, to spend the rest of the long, hot summer in bed, and probably not

die of it at all, these were possibilities before which Jeanne, courageous as she was, felt her heart fail, and a cold chill creep through her veins. Meanwhile, her light carriage was swaying, lurching, and bumping onwards at a pace too good to last. Before her was a stretch of flat, straight road; but at the end of it was an awkward sharp corner that she knew of, and beyond that was a bridge with stone parapets. It was true that, if by any miracle she should happen to pass safely through these perils, she would shortly reach a stiff piece of rising ground, upon which it was likely enough that she might succeed in pulling up the runaways; but she plainly perceived that her chance of ever seeing that hill was but a poor one, and, in the meantime, she was drawing nearer and nearer to the dreaded corner. Suddenly the tall figure of a horseman shot up between her and the sky, and stood motionless directly in her path. Recognising Saint-Luc and the new danger that threatened her simultaneously, she stood up, steadying herself by grasping the dashboard, and shouted to him, with all her force, to get out of the way. But it was too late. Either he did not hear or did not understand; for, instead of drawing to one side, he spurred his horse towards her, and threw up his arms.

The catastrophe was over in a moment. Caïd swerved violently, crossed his legs, and came down with a crash like the fall of a house, dragging the other pony after him; and Jeanne, thrown forward by the shock, found herself upon her hands and knees on the wayside grass, dazed and shaken, but not in the least hurt.

When she had in some degree recovered command of her senses, she was standing up, mechanically brushing the dust off the front of her dress. Saint-Luc was bending over her anxiously, with a face as white as his linen jacket; the ponies, trembling and subdued, were upon their legs again, and the blood was slowly falling, drop by drop, from an ugly scrape upon Caïd's shoulder.

'How unfortunate!' she ejaculated, pointing to this wound; 'he is marked for life.'

'Who? That wretched little beast? As if it signified!' cried Saint-Luc; 'but you—are you sure you are not hurt?'

'Yes, there is nothing the matter with me—nothing at all.'

'God be praised!' he exclaimed piously, taking off his hat.

Jeanne looked at him with a vague surprise, but said

nothing. Her ideas were still a little confused, and she did not yet realise that Saint-Luc had just saved her life, and might possibly expect some words of thanks.

‘What a mercy it was that I chanced to meet you just in the nick of time!’ he went on. ‘I am sorry I had to give you such a terrible shaking; but it was the only thing to be done, and the ponies will not be much the worse, I think.’

‘I should have stopped them when I got to the hill,’ answered Jeanne, not very graciously. ‘What could have made you place yourself just in our path? I shall never be able to understand how it was that we were not both killed.’

‘A horse will never run into another horse, or a man, or indeed anything, unless he cannot possibly stop himself,’ said Saint-Luc, with some modest satisfaction in the success of his rather hazardous exploit. ‘I knew that your runaways would see me from a sufficient distance to make an attempt at getting out of my way, and I thought it very likely that they would do what, in fact, they did do—swerve, and slip up. There was the chance of your being thrown out and hurt, no doubt; but I think you would have had a worse accident if I had not stopped you. It makes me shudder to think of what might have happened if your carriage had been dashed, as it almost certainly would have been, against the parapet of that bridge.’

‘Yes, I had been dreading the bridge,’ confessed Jeanne. ‘I dare say you were quite right to do as you did. The only misfortune is that Caïd should be so terribly marked; for I know Léon will be very much annoyed when he sees him. However, it can’t be helped. The best thing we can do now is to get him home as quickly as possible, poor little fellow, and have him attended to.’

So saying, she got into the pony-carriage again, and resumed the reins, while Saint-Luc admiringly complimented her upon her courage.

‘Most ladies,’ he said, ‘would have insisted upon walking home.’

‘Not if they were as tired as I am,’ answered Jeanne, with a faint smile, as she drew her whip gently across Sheikh’s back.

The remainder of the homeward journey—an interminable distance, as it seemed to her—was performed, of necessity, at a foot’s pace, her lover riding beside her with an air of watchful solicitude, which, considering that one of her ponies was dead lame and that both were thoroughly exhausted and subdued,

was perhaps slightly absurd. At ordinary times, such a display of care and implied proprietorship would have irritated her beyond bearing, but now she was too dispirited to mind it. In her adventure and its commonplace ending, she fancied she could trace an answer to those questioning hopes and fears as to her future with which she had set out some hours before. Apparently there were but two alternatives before her—death, or Saint-Luc; and since the former destiny was evidently not to be hers, where was the use of quarrelling with the latter?

She bore his respectful homage and adoring glances with a composure half forced, half apathetic; and remembering, as her nerves gradually recovered themselves, what was due to her rescuer, thanked him for risking his safety in a little, cold, set speech, which he jumped at as a hungry dog snatches at a dry bone.

‘You have nothing to thank me for,’ he cried eagerly. ‘My life is yours to do what you like with, and I am ready to lay it down for you whenever and wherever you please.’

‘You are very kind to say so,’ she replied gravely; ‘but that is not necessary, nor likely to be. Will you not come in?’ she added, for they were now at the entrance of the Campagne de Mersac.

‘No, thank you,’ he answered hesitatingly. ‘You are tired, and do not want me.’

She did not contradict him. ‘Till to-morrow, then,’ she said, bowing to him, as she turned in through the gates with a look of relief upon her face which she was as powerless to conceal as he was to ignore.

And if Jeanne went to bed with a heavy heart that night, it is probable that Saint-Luc’s was not much lighter.

CHAPTER XXI.

AN UNROMANTIC PARTING.

THE very first thing that Jeanne did, on waking the next morning, was to read Barrington’s letter over again from beginning to end: for mere courtesy required of her that she should return some answer to it; and though her half-formed hopes of yesterday were all faded and dead now, she had not yet quite made up her mind as to the shape which that answer should take.

A reperusal of the letter did not help her much. Who does not know what it is to pore and puzzle over a carelessly-written page, and to turn the words this way and that, with an intense longing to get at the writer's real thought and meaning? And who has not learnt the futility of such efforts? How much do those nearest and dearest to us know of what is passing in our minds, or we of what is passing in theirs, even when we sit side by side? We can but suspect and guess, and, as often as not, guess wrongly; and if voice, face, and gesture cannot answer our unspoken questions, what but mere bewilderment and vexation can be expected from a prolonged scrutiny of paper and ink? Jeanne worried herself for an hour over Barrington's rhapsodical effusion, and was a good deal further from understanding it at the end of that time than she had been at the beginning—though, to be sure, its meaning would not have presented much difficulty to a more indifferent reader. In the end it seemed to her at once the wisest and most dignified to leave the hints it contained without response, and to reply only to its congratulations. She sat down, therefore, and penned a short, formal note, in which she thanked Mr. Barrington for his good wishes, referred, in a few well-chosen words, to the pleasant days she had spent in his company during the past winter and spring, and expressed a friendly hope that her acquaintance with him might be renewed at some future time. This was all very well; and had Jeanne's letter been suffered to end with her signature, it would have conveyed a salutary snub to a quarter where such gentle correctives were much needed. But unfortunately she thought fit to add, after a good deal of hesitation, a postscript which spoilt all. 'I do not know why you should say that I dislike M. de Saint-Luc. He is, and always has been, very kind to me. In France, as you know, marriages are usually arrangements of family convenience; but in my case, at least, my consent was asked, and given. I suppose that few people, either in France or England, can choose exactly the life they would prefer; and no doubt everybody has dreams and fancies, such as you write of, which end in nothing. My old friend, the Curé of El Biar, who likes to philosophise, says that all earthly happiness is imaginary, and that the more it is confined to dreams the nearer it approaches to reality.'

Having made this unwise addition to her letter, Jeanne folded and addressed it; and then, taking up Barrington's two sheets, resolutely tore them across and across, and dropped

them into the waste-paper basket. 'I have done with the past,' quoth she, as she descended the stairs to face the present, which, in the person of M. de Saint-Luc, might, as she knew, be expected to manifest itself at any moment.

An unexpected respite was, however, in store for her. At that moment Saint-Luc, instead of toiling up the hill towards El Biar, was seated in a railway carriage, jogging westward at the deliberate pace affected by Algerian express trains, and bent upon the charitable errand of visiting the sick. The early post had brought him a piteous appeal from a young officer of his acquaintance, one Lasalle, who, having been ordered to the hill fortress of Miliannah some months before, was now detained there by an attack of malarious fever, after all his comrades had left for the war. 'Come and see me,' wrote this unlucky soldier; 'you, who do not know how to fill up your days. I do not say that you will find the excursion a pleasant one (though it is a fact that our air up here is cooler than that of Algiers, and I believe the scenery is considered fine by those who have visited it from choice), but I think you would not hesitate to come if you knew what an inestimable blessing the sight of a civilised fellow-creature would be to me. When I am not burning or shivering, I lie upon my bed and do nothing at all, except moan, and wish I were dead. The only souls I have to exchange a word with, from morning to night, are my servant and my doctor; and neither of them is very good company. Give me but four-and-twenty hours of your society, and, if I live, I will never forget your kindness.'

Saint-Luc, who was as kind-hearted a creature as ever walked the earth in the disguise of a Parisian *roué*, and who, having had Algerian fever himself in old days, was acquainted with the ups and downs of that wearisome and depressing malady, began to pack up his clothes forthwith. He would, no doubt, have responded to his friend's call in any case; but at that particular time he did so with the more alacrity, by reason of a melancholy conviction that, on private and personal grounds, it would be well that he should take a short leave of absence from Algiers. For some days past it had been evident to him that his presence was irksome to Jeanne, that he was making no progress with her, and that there was not the faintest chance of his gaining her affections before marriage. It wanted now but a few weeks to his wedding-day, and he had come, rather sadly, to the conclusion that, during those weeks, his best policy would be to keep himself as much as possible out of sight.

On his way to the station he encountered Léon, who received the news of his intended departure with perfect equanimity, and undertook to make the necessary explanations at home.

‘If I were you, I would make a longer trip of it, and go on to Teniet-el-Haad and the cedar forest,’ said that unsympathetic youth. ‘Algiers is detestable in August, and you have nothing to keep you here. I wish I could offer to accompany you; but I have an engagement to-morrow at Madame de Trémonville’s—in fact, for several reasons, I cannot very well go away just now.’

‘I see,’ answered Saint-Luc, smiling. ‘You are wanted here, and I am not. It is consolatory to know that, if I should be detained longer than I expect, nobody will miss me.’

Léon began to protest; but Saint-Luc cut him short, saying that he was late for his train, and so hurried on his way, laughing a little under his breath, but without much genuine mirth.

A tedious, hot railway journey brought him at length to the little village of Bou-Medfa, where he hired a horse, and strapping his valise on his saddle before him, set out, in the cool of the evening, to mount the spur of the lesser Atlas, upon which Milianah stands.

Delicious little gusts of fresh air came swirling down the hillside to meet him, as he rode, and roused a soft, musical stir among the evergreen oaks and firs, the myrtles, lentisks, and brushwood which bordered the way; beneath him the parched plain lay sweltering in a hazy heat; but high above, bare peaks and rocky spires stood out, black and clear, against the fiery glow of the sunset, and every now and then his ear caught the sound of distant falling water. After a time he came upon a small modern village of the universal Algerian type, with detached white houses on either side of its single broad street, a double row of plane-trees to keep the sun from the windows, and a fountain, round which some half-dozen chattering women were clustered. Presently a company of low-browed, thin-lipped Spaniards, with laden mules, came striding down the mountain side, singing a nasal, plaintive chorus as they walked, and passed on, leaving a fine odour of garlic behind them. On a wall, in the outskirts of the village, lay a couple of lazy negroes sucking oranges. One of them, a stalwart fellow, whose shapely black limbs were scantily clad in white linen, and who had stuck a scarlet pomegranate-blossom behind his ear, turned round, with a grin, as the horseman approached, and offered him a branch of the golden fruit. There was an abundance of

life, strength, and colour in this high region which could hardly fail to delight a traveller just escaped from the listless exhaustion of the Metidja; and Saint-Luc, feeling the level of his spirits rising in equal measure with that of his body, congratulated himself upon the humane impulse which had led him to quit Algiers for a season.

'It was fortunate that the incidents of his excursion pleased him so well, seeing that, so far as its chief object was concerned, he might have saved himself the trouble of undertaking it. For the very first person whom he met, after passing through the gates of Milianah, was M. Lasalle himself, who, though pale and thin, was apparently in a condition of exuberant joy.

'Is that you, Saint-Luc?' he cried. 'And did you come here to see me? A thousand thanks! but if I had only known, I would have telegraphed to you not to start. I have got my orders to rejoin the regiment forthwith, and by means of threatening the doctor's life I have made him declare me fit for service. Never mind; we will go back to Algiers together tomorrow, and you will be none the worse for having had a little change of air. You have heard the last news, of course?'

'There is no news,' said Saint-Luc.

'You mean to say that there was none when you left Algiers, this morning; but a telegram has arrived here which must have passed you on the way, I suppose. And, *ma foi!*' continued M. Lasalle, with a light shrug of his shoulders, 'to tell the truth, it is not precisely a telegram of the right kind. Here it is, if you wish to see it.'

Dismounting before the door of the modest little Hôtel d'Isly, Saint-Luc read the official despatch announcing the combat of Wissembourg. MacMahon's left wing defeated, General Abel Douai killed, the lines of Wissembourg stormed by the enemy—Saint-Luc pursed up his lips, and looked very grave over it; but his companion, being in a humour to view all things in a rosy aspect, made light of the affair.

'Bah!' said he, 'there is no great harm done. Our men fought like lions; but they were outnumbered. And the Maréchal is no fool. Depend upon it, he has his plan, and is only drawing back that he may spring the more surely.'

'Perhaps so,' answered Saint-Luc, folding up the paper; 'but I confess that, for my own part, I do not like plans which begin by accepting a defeat. In the meantime, I am dying of hunger. Come in, and let us see what they can do for us in the way of dinner.'

‘No, no ; you are my guest. I cannot offer you a *Maison Dorée menu*, but such as the food is here, you shall have plenty of it ; and we will finish the last bottle of champagne that I shall drink in this accursed place.

But neither dinner, nor champagne, nor any contagion of high spirits, availed to dispel Saint-Luc’s gloom. He left all the talking to his friend, ate little, in spite of the hunger he had professed, and while the other fought battles in anticipation, routing the enemy and triumphantly dictating terms of peace under the walls of Berlin, drummed abstractedly upon the table, oppressed by a vague dissatisfaction which he could not altogether lay to the charge of public misfortune.

Later in the evening the two men strolled out to the ram-parts to smoke a last cigar before turning in for the night. Beneath and around the rocky flank of Mount Zakkar, on which Milianah stands, a far-stretching panorama unfolded itself—the fertile valley of the Chélif, dimly seen through the blue night-mists that hung over it, shadowy hills and woods, and jutting promontories, and outlines of rugged mountain-ranges lying solemn and silent under the stars. M. Lasalle, whose finer feelings were stirred, and whose tongue was loosened by the effects of champagne and excitement upon a frame weakened by malaria, felt the influence of the scene in such limited degree as induced speech rather than more fitting silence.

‘It is beautiful—it is even sublime,’ said he, nodding at the landscape with the air of an impartial man resolved to give the devil his due ; ‘but it is desperately melancholy. Yes ; rest and peace make up a very pretty picture ; but when one is forced to form a part of the tableau, one begins to ask oneself whether life is worth having. They may say what they please about the misery of war, but there is no game like it, and no life like a soldier’s. It is better to risk losing a leg or an arm at the wars than to sit in plenty and dulness at home, and read the newspapers.’

Saint-Luc grunted. This was the very thought which had been disturbing his own mind for the last two hours, or more but it vexed him to hear it expressed in plain language, and there was a certain tinge of exultation in his friend’s tone which, under all the circumstances, appeared to him to show a deplorable want of good taste.

‘Of course, it is the nature of man to delight in destroying his species—everybody knows that,’ he said. ‘It only shows how little we are above the beasts.’

'That is no affair of mine,' answered M. Lasalle, airily. 'I did not create the human race, and I am not responsible for its instincts. Such as we are, it is very evident to me that we shall not abolish war during the present generation; and I am glad to think that, so long as France has an army, I shall be in it.'

'If you are more fortunate than others, you need not be perpetually telling them so,' said Saint-Luc, very snappishly.

Good-natured M. Lasalle burst into a shout of laughter. 'I knew it! I knew it!' he cried. 'He is not the man to stay at home while his comrades are fighting, this old Saint-Luc. Come to France with me, *mon vieux*, and we will do the campaign together. A place shall be found for you in the regiment—never fear about that. In time of war one can always discover a corner for old friends by squeezing a little; and the Prussian shells will soon give us elbow-room. Besides, I have an uncle at the War Office—which is as much as to say that you are reinstated in your old grade as soon as you please. Let us consider it as settled.'

'You forget,' answered Saint-Luc, 'that I am to be married next month.'

'Postpone it, my dear friend—postpone the ceremony; there is never any cause for hurry in such matters. You can be married at the end of the year, or next year, or the year after—'

'Whereas I may never have another chance of dying on the field of battle. I do not deny that, for some reasons, I should like very much to have a look at *messieurs les Prussiens*; but one cannot arrange everything exactly as one would wish; and my wedding-day is fixed.'

'Mademoiselle will excuse you for a few months, if you will bring her back some laurels to mix with her orange-flowers.'

'No, she will not; for I shall not propose anything of the sort to her,' answered Saint Luc, remembering, with a secret pang, how little opposition Jeanne would be likely to offer to his departure. 'And I do not want to be excused. If the war had broken out a year ago, I should have joined the army as a simple trooper, without a moment's hesitation; as it is, the regiment will have to do without me. Shall we go in now? If you linger out here in the night air much longer, you may get a return of your fever, and never see Berlin at all.'

M. Lasalle said no more. He was a little afraid of Saint-

Luc, and remembered to have heard that there was some romantic history connected with his engagement which might possibly render the subject a delicate one. Only, the whole way back to the inn, he hummed *Partant pour la Syrie*, under his breath, which was neither kind nor considerate of him.

Saint-Luc passed an uneasy night, divided between troubled dreams and scarcely less troubled waking thoughts. A few months earlier, to be the affianced husband of Jeanne de Mersac would have seemed to him the very summit of earthly happiness and the satisfaction of all wildest hope; but now that Fortune had granted him what he had always looked upon as nearly, if not quite, beyond his reach, he was far from being contented, and fretted himself out of a night's rest because he could discover no practicable way of exchanging his imminent happiness against the chance of wounds, privations, and death. Such is the perversity of our mortal nature.

At the same time, it must be said for him that his desire to proceed to the seat of war arose less out of martial ardour (though of that he had as large a share as might reasonably be expected to linger in the breast of a man whose brightest memories were connected with fighting) than from a longing to show Jeanne that he was not quite the contemptible fellow she took him for. He was perfectly aware that she had a poor opinion of him, and did not wonder at it—his own self-estimate being so modest a one: but he knew that, whatever virtues he might lack, he at least possessed that of physical courage; and he fancied, pardonably enough, that he might conquer her respect, if not her love, by doughty deeds.

The thing was, however, entirely out of the question, and there was no use in thinking about it. Scores of times he repeated this conclusion to himself during the night and morning, and then proceeded to think about it more than ever. In fact, throughout the long railway-journey back to Algiers, his mind was occupied with no other subject.

M. Lasalle, meanwhile, continued to behave badly. Of nothing would he speak but of professional matters—of the important part destined to be played by light cavalry in all future campaigns—of the superiority of Arab over European horses—of the glorious excitement of a charge, the one romantic feature remaining in modern warfare. And from time to time he would check himself with an innocent apology for dwelling upon such topics, ‘which,’ said he, ‘no longer interest you, I dare say.’ Long before the sea came in sight, Saint-Luc had

lost all patience with this eager warrior; and, rather than face the *tête-à-tête* dinner which he saw looming before him, he swallowed down the reluctance he always felt to enter the Campagne de Mersac uninvited, and hiring a carriage on his arrival at the station, had himself driven direct thither.

It thus came to pass that the disastrous intelligence of the battle of Reichshoffen first reached him from Jeanne's lips.

'We have just received bad news from France,' said she, coming forward to meet him as he entered the drawing-room, and passing by unnoticed his apologetic explanation of the suddenness of his return. 'Have you heard it? It seems that the Maréchal has been defeated.'

'I arrive this moment from Milianah; I have heard nothing,' answered Saint-Luc, and never so much as asked for any particulars. For the moment, it really was not in him to feel for his country's joys or woes, and Jeanne might have announced the result of the battle of Armageddon to him and left him equally unmoved; for all his perceptions seemed, by the exercise of some force beyond his control, to have become concentrated upon her, and there was no room in his mind for any thought unconnected with her. She stood before him in the dim light of the evening, a tall, lithe figure, dressed all in white, with shapely head bent a little forwards, and large, melancholy eyes that looked beyond him. Turco, stationed at her side, wagged his tail in grave welcome. In the shadowy background, the Duchess, M. de Fontvieille, and Léon were grouped close together, peering over a slip of newspaper, and talking, all three of them at once, in their high-pitched French voices. What was it that made Saint-Luc see, with a sudden, vivid clearness, the impassable gulf that lay between him and the girl whose hand he held, and smote him with a chill certainty that, come what might, they could never be more than virtual strangers to each other? It was no sense of his own unworthiness—that had been with him, even in an exaggerated degree, from the outset—nor was it that her manner evinced the utmost indifference to him; for that was a point upon which he had never harboured illusions. It was a swift, unaccountable flash of conviction, such as everyone experiences occasionally, and mostly at unexpected times; and whether it arose from some occult touch of sympathy, or from a baffled effort thereat, whether it were real or visionary, well or ill founded, it made his heart ache with a hopeless yearning, the like of which he had never felt before.

And all this time—that is to say, during some thirty seconds—Jeanne left her hand lying in his, just as she might have allowed it to rest upon a chair or table. But now, remembering herself, she drew back a little, and saying, ‘You would like to see the telegram, perhaps,’ gently took away the slip of newspaper from the others, who continued their discussion without noticing her, and handed it to him.

It was one of those hastily-printed scraps, issued from a local newspaper office, with which the inhabitants of the French provinces were soon to become well acquainted. There was not much in it beyond the admission that MacMahon’s army had received a heavy blow. Rumours of all kinds were abroad, and were duly reported, ‘under all reserves.’ ‘But,’ concluded the document, ‘details are absolutely wanting.’ The Emperor’s own despatch, indeed, forwarded from Paris, showed how little was known of the affair at head-quarters. ‘It was the General de l’Aigle who announced to me that the Maréchal MacMahon had lost a battle on the Sarre—I am about to place myself in the centre of the position—*Tout peut se réparer.*’

Saint-Luc, who had now recovered possession of his senses, perused these confessions of impotent ignorance with a mixture of anger and dismay. What was there to hope for from a commander-in-chief capable of such foolish candour?

M. de Fontvieille, whose grief at the inauspicious opening of the campaign was in some degree tempered by the recollection that he had always prophesied ill of it, uttered but one comment upon the unlucky despatch. ‘*He* in the centre of the position! what a menace!’ he ejaculated, with uplifted hands; and then withdrew to a window, and looked out at the sunset, fearing lest he might be tempted to weaken the severity of his stricture by further speech.

‘That poor Emperor! it is all over with him,’ remarked the Duchess, with a certain contemptuous pity. ‘He may go back to Paris now, and pack up his portmanteau; for unless I am very much mistaken, we have heard the last of Napoleon III.’

‘And of Napoleon IV.,’ added M. de Fontvieille, from the window.

‘Let us hope so. At present, it seems to me that France is at the mercy of the first successful general. Heaven grant that that may be MacMahon, for he, I think, would only ascend the steps of the throne to prepare it for the king.’

‘It is more likely to be Bazaine—who would make haste to sit down upon it himself,’ said Saint-Luc.

Léon observed that they were all in a very great hurry. Campaigns were not decided by the first battle, nor did dynasties fall for a single blunder. No doubt the Emperor had been deceived; he had found that he must reckon with Germany instead of with Prussia, and this might very possibly put an end to all project of crossing the Rhine; but, on the other hand, the invasion of France was a hazardous enterprise of which the Germans would be glad to be relieved. He (Léon) had reason to believe that diplomacy was already at work, and that a solution would shortly be found which would bring about an honourable peace. Something in the shape of a victory would certainly be necessary to satisfy the national *amour propre*; but after the first success obtained by the French troops, negotiations might begin. Let the one nation be permitted to consolidate itself into a great empire, and the other to extend its frontier a little—say in a north-easterly direction—and all would be well. The two armies might then shake hands, and march off to their respective homes, singing *Te Deum à qui mieux mieux*.

‘That is Madame de Trémonville’s view, I presume,’ said Saint-Luc, divining at once the origin of this specious plan.

‘And pray, who is Madame de Trémonville?’ inquired the Duchess. ‘Oh, that amusing and impertinent little person, who wears a *pince-nez*. What can she know of diplomacy? I, who have been a little behind the scenes in my time, can assure you that diplomatists have some difficulty in making their voices heard above the thunder of the cannon. You cannot bring a victorious army to a standstill by flourishing a protocol in its face. I have no pretension to say how or when this war will end, nor what we may gain or lose by it, but I am tolerably certain that it will deprive us of one possession which we can very well spare—the Bonaparte family. There is consolation in that.’

‘Provided we do not get the D’Orléans in exchange,’ sighed M. de Fontvieille. ‘Those people are only awaiting their opportunity.’

‘The D’Orléans have no party,’ said the Duchess decisively. ‘They represent nothing—not even constitutional government, which has been filched from them by the Empire. In the coming crisis there can only be two parties—Republicans and Legitimists—and whichever of them can gain the army must win the day. We have nearly reached the time when all loyal

subjects should declare themselves. Do you not agree with me, M. de Saint-Luc ?

'Madame,' answered Saint-Luc, 'it seems to me that the question of dynasties can wait. I think that all loyal Frenchmen should be content to serve France now.'

'So do I,' said Jeanne.

Saint-Luc glanced at her gratefully, not being accustomed to hearing his sentiments so cordially endorsed in that quarter; and she added, 'If I were a man I would go to the war to-morrow.'

This speech, which gave Saint-Luc matter for reflection, elicited a vigorous protest from the Duchess, who, ever since the beginning of the struggle, had been haunted by a terror that, sooner or later, Léon would be drawn into it. Such ideas, she said, were altogether childish—not to say unpatriotic. Of those brought up to the military profession she did not speak; but a civilian of talent and education could serve his country in almost any way better than by stopping a cannon-ball—a feat which could be accomplished quite as effectually by any hewer of wood or drawer of water.

In her eagerness she made the personal application of her remarks so evident that M. de Fontvieille, who was quite as anxious as she to keep Léon safely at home, hastened to lead the conversation back into the less dangerous channel of public affairs, down which it flowed quietly and without interruption for the next two hours. The Duchess, M. de Fontvieille, and Léon had it all their own way; for Jeanne was even more silent than usual, and Saint-Luc, whose brow was dark with clouds of preoccupation, scarcely opened his lips from the announcement of dinner to the end of that repast, and never once spoke to his *fiancée*.

But when the whole party had adjourned to the verandah, where cane-chairs, coffee, and cigarettes were awaiting them, he approached Jeanne at last, and said, 'Mademoiselle'—he had never yet ventured to address her in any less formal manner than this—'will you walk to the end of the garden with me? I have something to say to you.'

'Certainly,' she answered, with an irrepressible intonation of reluctance which he detected but did not choose to notice; and so they disappeared slowly into the darkness, side by side, to the great delight of the Duchess, whose mind had latterly been a good deal exercised by the unromantic ways of this pair of presumed lovers.

If she could have overheard their conversation, she would have been less contented. Saint-Luc remained so long silent that Jeanne felt compelled, at length, to take the initiative.

‘You had something to speak to me about,’ she began.

‘Yes. I have been thinking of what you said before dinner about the war, and that, if you were a man, you would go there. I feel convinced that you are right, and that the army is the proper place just now for every Frenchman who—who has not any very binding ties to keep him at home. And you are not the only person who has expressed the same opinion to me within the last few days.’

She stopped short, with a quick gesture of apprehension. ‘You do not mean Léon?’ she exclaimed. ‘Has he said anything to you upon the subject? Surely you would never be so cruel as to encourage him to leave us! Remember what he is—the last of his name—an only son, one might almost say; for indeed the Duchess is as good as his mother, and would break her heart if anything happened to him. I spoke hastily and foolishly, and I did not really mean what I said—’

‘Do not be alarmed,’ broke in Saint-Luc gently; ‘I am sure that Léon will do his duty better by remaining where he is than by fighting the Prussians. I had a far less important person in my mind—myself.’

‘You!’

There was some surprise in her tone, but no inflection of dismay; and Saint-Luc was unreasonable enough to feel pained by her composure.

‘Yes,’ he resumed, striving to assume a cheerful and matter-of-fact air; ‘I learnt the sabre-exercise when I was a lad, and I believe it is the only thing in the world that I can do really well. I can easily join my old regiment now—most likely as an officer, though I don’t hold to that—and I know that my death would not cause so much grief to anybody that I need hesitate on that score; but of course, if I went, our marriage would have to be postponed. Would you object to that?’

‘No,’ answered Jeanne slowly; ‘I should not object.’

She debated within herself, for a moment, whether she ought not to make some reference to the payment of Léon’s debt, which would thus also require to be postponed; but finally decided that it was not her business to do so.

‘And now, there is another thing which I should like to ask you,’ resumed Saint-Luc, after a long pause. ‘Would you not prefer that our marriage should never take place at all?’

Jeanne turned away, and stood still, with clasped hands, gazing through the dark branches of a belt of cypress-trees at the star-studded sky and the free, wide sea, on which a path of silver from the rising moon shimmered. How gladly—oh, how gladly!—would she have answered Yes, and regained her longed-for liberty. But it was too late to falter now, she thought, and it would be as cowardly in her to abandon her purpose as in a soldier to run away under fire. She was not in the least grateful to Saint-Luc for offering her a means of retreat which he must know in his heart that she could not accept with honour, and it was in particularly icy accents that she replied at last—‘You remember what I told you in the beginning, M. de Saint-Luc. I have never deceived you. I never pretended that I should have chosen you for a husband if—I had only had myself to think of; but I consented to marry you for the reasons which I mentioned at the time. What I said then I say still. Indeed I am more bound to you than I was; for you have been very kind to me; and I suppose that when you stopped the ponies the other day, you saved my life—which most people would reckon a kindness. If you have changed your mind and wish our engagement to come to an end, I shall be neither surprised nor offended; but for me I am as content now as I was then.’

Saint-Luc sighed. Almost he felt inclined to give up the game. He was still under the influence of that discouraging impression of hopeless distance from Jeanne which had fallen upon him, in the drawing-room, before dinner, and which her present bearing was little calculated to remove. Yet he could not quite bring himself to resign her. Some lingering rays of forlorn hope even now brightened the darkness of his prospects. Time, absence, wounds and medals—all these might prove allies; and moreover he still clung to the notion that, with women, love often follows, instead of preceding marriage—which, after all, is a generally received theory, and may possibly be not quite so absurd a one as it sounds.

He took time to think over all this; for Jeanne had paused in her walk to gather some of the heavy-scented white bells of a datura-shrub, and seemed in no hurry for her companion's reply. When he did speak, it was more in answer to his own thoughts than to her suggestion.

‘While there is a chance for me, I will hold to it,’ he said. ‘Let us remain as we are at least until the end of the war. Before then much may have happened. I may have been killed, for instance, which would settle everything.’

'Are you not afraid of death?' asked Jeanne, looking at him with a shade of curiosity.

'No. Are you?'

'I am not sure. So few people are prepared to die.'

'Do you mean that I am not? That is true enough, I dare say; but I am as prepared as I am ever likely to be. I cannot see beyond the grave.'

'Are you a sceptic then?' asked Jeanne, with bated breath, as who should say, 'Are you a murderer?'

'I have scarcely the right to call myself so. I neither believe nor disbelieve; I have never thought about religion at all, one way or the other, and seldom heard it mentioned, except as a pretty fable or allegory, supported chiefly by social necessities. If it be all true, I have no doubt allowances will be made for me.'

'I shall pray for you,' said Jeanne gravely.

'Will you? Will you really do that?' cried Saint-Luc eagerly, attaching more importance, it is to be feared, to the act of intercession than to its possible results. 'Then you will think of me sometimes when I am away?'

'I should pray for anybody who did not believe in God,' answered Jeanne; 'and as for thinking of you, of course I should do that in any case. I never forget people. When do you mean to start?'

'To-morrow, I think.'

'So soon as that!'

'Why not? My departure will afflict nobody, and my friend Lasalle sails at midday. Besides, I must not lose time if I am to take part in the battle of Chalons.'

'The battle of Chalons?'

'It will be there, or thereabouts, I fancy. At all events, I shall have to hurry in order to get to the regiment in time. Even as it is, I may be detained by useless formalities.'

'What will the Duchess say? I don't know how I am to tell her,' murmured Jeanne, growing a little alarmed as the serious nature of the situation revealed itself to her.

'I will undertake that. What does it signify what she says? What does anything signify? Let us go in at once, and get it over. And now, as I shall not see you alone again, I will say good-bye.'

He took her passive hand, and, for the second time since their betrothal, pressed it to his lips; and she, withdrawing it presently, said, in her low, grave voice, 'Good-bye.'

This was all their leave-taking ; and Jeanne, thinking it over afterwards, reproached herself for having let the poor fellow go without a single kind word to cheer him on his way. Even at the time her heart was a little softened towards him ; but she would not show it, being restrained by a foolish apprehension lest, at this supreme moment, encouragement might lead him into some less deferential expression of regard.

So they re-entered the house together ; and the unsuspecting Duchess called out gaily, from her corner, ‘ Well, young people, here you are at last ! We were thinking of sending Léon out with a lantern to look for you.’

CHAPTER XXII.

‘ THAT IMBECILE OF AN EMPEROR.’

ON a sultry, airless evening in the beginning of September, a small party of ladies were seated, busily stitching bandages, arranging piles of linen, and tearing up lint, in the *salon* of one of the largest houses in Algiers. The room, which belonged to an old Moorish palace, was lofty, thick-walled, jealously screened by outside blinds against any slant rays of the sun which might penetrate into the narrow streets of the Arab quarter, and from the court-yard below its open windows rose the soft pattering of a fountain, which conveyed some notion of coolness to the ear, if to no other of the senses ; but, for all that, the heat was well-nigh unbearable. From early morning the fierce sun had been beating down upon the roofs and walls and pavements of the town, and had so scorched and baked them that even now, when he was sinking below the horizon, they still seemed to throb and glow as they had done at noon. No faintest stir of breeze found its way among those closely-packed dwellings ; out of doors the streets were untenanted, save by here and there an exhausted Arab, lying half-asleep in the shade ; a universal silence and lassitude hung over the place, and was not without its influence on those busy French ladies, whose occupation was not in itself of a cheering nature, and who had all, besides, good reasons of their own for feeling anxious and dispirited.

However, they chatted away over their work, bravely making the best of bad times, as their people always do.

‘Does it *never* rain here in September, madame?’ asked one of them of the mistress of the house, a certain Madame André, whose husband had held an appointment in Algiers longer than any of those present could remember.

The old lady shook her head. ‘Never,’ she answered; ‘unless, as sometimes happens, we get a few drops from a passing storm; and that is not enough to cool the air. September is our worst month; but one lives through it, and it only lasts thirty days, when all is said and done.’

‘Live through it?—that remains to be seen. Never, if I do survive this, will I murmur at the sight of rain again! And to think that, if all had gone well, I was to have been at Baden now for the races! Alas, I fear I have seen the last of Baden.’

‘Not a doubt of it,’ said another. ‘Germany is closed to us for a generation at least; and I am sorry for it; for what shall I do now with my summers?’

‘One must make shift with Trouville and Vichy and such places. I do not feel as if I could complain of any fate, so long as I am not left to spend the hot weather in Algeria again. But that is what it is to have a general for one’s husband.’

‘*Mon Dieu*, madame, you might be worse off. Generals are too valuable to be put in dangerous places. My husband, who is but a colonel of infantry, carries his life in his hand. I could almost wish that he were not a field-officer, so that he might be less conspicuous.’

‘The staff suffer most of all, they say,’ remarked another lady. ‘Think of those who used to form our own little circle last winter. Poor M. de Monceaux killed—and so many others! Is it not astonishing how coolly we take it all? I think one of the saddest things about war is that it so soon accustoms people to read quite calmly of wounds and sufferings which would make them shudder in time of peace. One comes to look upon it as a sort of game, and thinks much more of which side wins an engagement than of all the horrors of the battle-field and the hospitals.’

‘It does not do to let the mind dwell upon such subjects,’ said Madame André. ‘I have two sons with the army, and if I were to allow myself to brood over what may be happening to them, I should soon be good for nothing. But I do not. I

commend them to the protection of the Blessed Virgin three times a day, and work as hard as I can for the wounded, and comfort myself by thinking that every hour brings us nearer to peace. And sometimes I get a letter from them—not so often as I could wish; but that one must not grumble at. A son, you see, be he never so good a one, is not the same thing as a husband or a lover. Now Mademoiselle de Mersac, I dare say, gets a letter by every mail. Do you continue to have good news of M. de Saint-Luc, mademoiselle?’

Madame André was one of those amiable, thick-skinned persons whose privilege it is to acquaint the hearts of the most forbearing with occasional thrills of the homicidal passion.

‘I do not correspond with M. de Saint-Luc,’ replied Jeanne coldly, without looking up from the heap of *charpie* before her. ‘My brother hears from him sometimes. He has got his commission as captain, and is quite well, I believe, and in good spirits.’

This speech occasioned a swift interchange of significant glances, raisings of eyebrows, and noiseless ejaculations; for these ladies were not so wholly absorbed by domestic anxiety but that they had found time to discuss in all its bearings Saint-Luc’s sudden and unexplained disappearance within a few weeks of his intended marriage; and the unanimous conclusion at which they had arrived was that he had been very badly treated. What bridegroom, they reasonably urged, would rush off to the wars from the very church-door, so to speak, unless his bride had either dismissed him or tried his patience beyond endurance? They were the more ready to blame Jeanne in this matter because she had not been so fortunate as to have earned their affection. They did not like her, and sometimes showed her their dislike—and she did not in the least care. M. de Fontvieille, to whom this unpopularity of his *protégée* caused a great deal of secret vexation, used to say that Jeanne would never have many friends among the Algerian ladies, for three sufficient reasons:—Firstly, because she was far handsomer than any of them; secondly, because she was better educated than all of them put together; and thirdly, because she despised gossip. The first of the causes assigned was, of course, ridiculous, since everybody knows that the notion of feminine jealousy on the score of personal beauty is a mere vulgar calumny, only believed in by silly and ignorant people; but it is possible that the other two may have been less imaginary; for there is unquestionably something a little

galling in intercourse with a person who is not only infinitely your superior, but is also, in a placid, polite way, perfectly aware of the fact.

Be this as it may, these excellent ladies had no love for our poor heroine; and when she presently rose, and bade them all a very good-evening, they began to breathe more freely.

'I am never comfortable when that girl is in the room,' said one of them, as soon as the door had closed behind her. 'She will not speak, and scarcely listens when she is spoken to, and I defy anybody to know what is passing in her mind. I am not aware that there is anything particularly contemptible or laughable about me, and yet she always gives me the impression that she thinks so.'

'She is a good girl,' said kindly Madame André; 'she does a great deal for the poor. But she is eccentric, which is a terrible defect in a woman. One must remember, however, that her mother was an Englishwoman. That explains much.'

Jeanne, meanwhile, as she toiled up the staircase-like streets of the Arab quarter, felt her conscience stirred by that chance question of Madame André's and the surprised silence which had followed her answer to it. Upon reflection, it certainly did sound odd that she should not be in direct communication with her future husband; and the annoying part of it was that she need not have made the fact public, and indeed would not have done so if heat and weariness and the exasperating arch smile of good Madame André had not combined to overpower all prudence. Perhaps, too, it would have been more wise, as it certainly would have been kinder, if she had let Saint-Luc hear from her every now and then. Almost his last words had been a timid suggestion with reference to this subject, but she had not responded favourably to the hint, having, in truth, no desire to be reminded of his existence, and not seeing that she was in any way bound to burden herself with an irksome task. At the time, her one wish had been that he would go away as quickly as possible, and let her neither see nor hear more of him until the day should come for the completion of her sacrifice; for it will easily be believed that, what with M. de Fontvieille's expostulations, and the Duchess's scoldings, entreaties, and tears, the evening of separation had not been an altogether agreeable one for either member of the betrothed couple.

But now all these preliminary troubles were over, and well-nigh forgotten. Jeanne's home circle had gradually

accepted the inevitable with more or less of philosophy, and four weeks had elapsed since Saint-Luc had bidden a long farewell to Algiers. Four weeks, stormy and eventful on the other side of the Mediterranean, and big with the fate of empires and of generations yet unborn, but quiet and peaceful enough here in remote Africa. Four weeks which had seen the fertile uplands of Mars-la-Tour and Gravelotte deluged with blood, which had witnessed an unbroken series of defeats for the French arms, and had taxed to the utmost the mendacious ingenuity of M. de Palikao and his colleagues. Four weeks which, in spite of the great heat, in spite of the garrulous irritability of the Duchess—who was ill, poor old soul, and naturally worried by the unexpected disturbance of her plans—in spite of the lamentable decease of the jackal Jérémie, who, having broken loose and eaten half-a-dozen chickens, had been incontinently slain by an irate farmer; in spite, too, of many a sad hour and vain regret, had brought more of contentment to Jeanne than she had ever expected to find again. For M. de Saint-Luc was gone; and in that one thought lay measureless relief.

She had kept her promise of praying for him, being in all things a person of her word, and duly offered up supplications for both his temporal and spiritual welfare at the hour of the *Ave Maria*, when it was her habit to kneel in the little village church. And this she did without mental reservation; for it never occurred to her to think that a German bullet might set many crooked things straight, or to doubt of the wanderer's eventual return. But she dismissed him from her mind, together with the remembrance of her sins and other unpleasant subjects, at the church-door, deeming, with King Solomon, that there is a time for every purpose under the heaven.

When, as would sometimes happen, some trifling incident, like Madame Andrié's unlucky speech, cropped up to remind her of her chains, she made haste to escape from the odious remembrance with such despatch as she could command; and now, acting upon this rule, she soon persuaded herself that the epistolary question was one which it was altogether unnecessary to consider, after so long a period of silence, and had recovered her ordinary equanimity by the time that she had passed through the gates of the town, and was out in the open country.

A cool breath of evening air met her as she emerged upon this higher ground, where nature was beginning to show signs

of returning animation, where the grasshoppers were in full chorus, and where bright-eyed lizards were darting swiftly from every chink and crevice of the rocks. Jeanne drew a long breath, and paused, upon the brink of the cliff, to cast a glance of pity upon the poor, stifled town at her feet. White, glaring, and silent, it sloped from brown hill-top to burning sapphire sea, all its touches of winter greenery vanished—a different Algiers indeed from that which had gratified Mr. Barrington's artistic eye, when he had stood upon this same spot some six months before. While Jeanne looked, a little cloud of dust rose from the lower gates of the town, and out of it appeared a cavalry officer, whose steel scabbard flashed in the sun, as he galloped helter-skelter up the zigzag road at a pace worthy of John Gilpin. Jeanne recognised the seat of this impetuous horseman, and smiled.

‘Léon will never learn that a horse's legs are not made of cast iron,’ she sighed.

Léon indeed it was, in the uniform of the Francs-Cavaliers de l'Algérie, a patriotic corps organised for purposes of local defence during the absence of the regular army, and which no doubt made up in valour what it lacked in numerical strength. Léon had been urged to enrol himself in it by M. de Fontvieille, who saw therein a safety-valve for the letting off of warlike hankerings; and so far it had answered its purpose very well, and had kept the young man in tolerable good humour with himself and his lot.

But now news had come from France of such a nature as to effectually rob mock soldiering of its solace, and to render inaction more than ever grievous to all true lovers of their country. Léon, as he stormed up the hill, regardless of the wind of his charger, was so wrapped in his own disturbed thoughts that he would have passed his sister without noticing her, if she had not called to him. At the sound of her voice he pulled up, with a clatter and a jingle, and breathlessly shouted out his evil tidings. ‘All is lost! The whole of MacMahon's forces have capitulated to the enemy, the Emperor is taken prisoner, Bazaine is shut up in Metz, and France has not a regular army left in the field.’

‘It is impossible!’

‘It is *true*. I had it from the Sub-Governor's own lips. And to crown all, they say Paris is in the hands of the mob.’

‘What will happen now, then? Shall we have peace?’

‘Who knows? It will depend upon what the Prussians may ask of us, I suppose. But I can’t stop.’

‘Where are you going in such a hurry?’

‘To Mustapha. I promised to let Madame de Trémonville know as soon as there was any news. *À bientôt!*’

And, with a wave of his hand, Léon spurred his horse, and was soon out of sight.

‘Always Madame de Trémonville!’ murmured Jeanne, with a slight shrug of her shoulders. ‘Poor boy! he little knows how ridiculous he is making himself.’

I suppose that when a man is being made a fool of by a woman, no one is more quick to discover the fact, and less ready to sympathise with the victim, than the ladies of his own family. Léon knew that Jeanne disapproved of Madame de Trémonville, and of his visits to her house; but, as she had truly said, he had no suspicion that he was making himself ridiculous. On the contrary, his estimation of himself had risen by several degrees since he had been given to understand by the most charming and most cruelly misjudged of her sex that she regarded him as the only real friend she had in the world.

The fact was that Madame de Trémonville had found herself rather short of admirers after the departure of the army, to which branch of the public service she was accustomed to look chiefly for recruits, and a flirtation of some kind being meat, drink, and raiment to her, had fixed upon the young Marquis to practise her arts upon, *faute de mieux*. He had been deeply smitten, as we have seen, months before; but now his subjugation was complete; and perhaps no more convincing proof of his devotion could have been found than in the fact that, even when he had such news as the wreck of the Empire to announce, he should have dismounted at the fair lady’s gates, and led his horse gingerly up the short avenue, fearing to disturb the siesta which ordinarily occupied the best part of her afternoon.

On the present occasion, however, he might have dispensed with this precaution; for Madame de Trémonville, arrayed in diaphanous white muslin, and holding a rose-lined parasol over her golden locks, met him on the threshold.

‘You are come to tell me of the battle of Sedan,’ she said. ‘How kind of you to hurry up in the heat, and to tire your poor, pretty horse so! But I have heard all about it from my husband, who returned from his office half an hour ago in a pitiable state of agitation. He has weak nerves, this poor

M. de Trémonville. What a lamentable spectacle is a man with weak nerves !’

‘You, at least, do not suffer in that way,’ remarked Léon admiringly. ‘All the way from the town I was thinking how I should prepare you for this terrible catastrophe, and now I find that you take it far more calmly than I can profess to do.’

‘My dear friend, I have foreseen it for so long. What else could be expected from an army rotten to the very core—demoralised by loose discipline, commanded by generals whose merit consisted in their servility and venality, and headed by that grotesque imbecile of an Emperor?’

‘Imbecile of an Emperor!’ echoed Léon, aghast at this diatribe from one of the staunchest adherents of the late régime.

‘Certainly. Have you not heard me call him so scores of times? No? Ah, well, one has to be careful in speaking of constituted authorities, but I have always thought that the Emperor was half-witted, and the event proves that I was right. If a man who declares war without knowing whether he is prepared or not, who gets himself beaten in every engagement, and finally hurries his last army into a mouse-trap, be not an imbecile, I do not know the meaning of the word.’

‘You do not think, then, that he will ever return to power?’ asked Léon with innocent irony.

‘Never!—never in the world! The Empire is as dead as Henri IV. The only thing to be done with it is to bury it out of sight, and to forget, if possible, all its blunders and infamies.’

This was really a little too bad. Mindful of the evening when he had been forced to humiliate himself publicly by shouting ‘*Vive l’Empereur!*’ Léon could not suffer such sentiments as these to pass without a gentle protest.

‘Surely you did not think so badly of the Empire six weeks ago, madame?’ said he.

‘Six weeks ago!’ returned Madame de Trémonville impatiently. ‘Six weeks ago everything was different. The wife of an official cannot always say exactly what she thinks; I should have thought anybody would have understood that. And besides, if the war had ended successfully, that would have atoned for many sins. It would not have been generous to condemn a government which was upon its trial. But are you not coming in? It would be very amiable of you if you would stay and dine, and amuse me for part of the evening.’

‘I will come in for a few minutes, if you will permit me, madame,’ answered Léon; ‘but I am afraid they will expect me to dine at home to-night; and even if I were to consult my own wishes, and remain with you, I should not be likely to amuse you. One can hardly be expected to feel cheerful with France at the mercy of an invader.’

Infatuated as Léon was, the cool cynicism of Madame de Trémonville shocked him a little, and made him doubt, for the first time since he had known her, whether he would altogether enjoy an evening spent in hearing her talk.

‘I am not cheerful,’ she answered, turning away; ‘but I would rather be sad in your company than alone. Of course, though, if your sister has ordered you to be home to dinner, you must go.’

This was a cut at Léon’s most sensitive point; but he did not choose to notice it, and entered the house in silence.

M. de Trémonville, who was sitting in the drawing-room with his head resting despondently upon his hands, started up at the sound of approaching footsteps.

‘Ah, Monsieur le Marquis,’ he exclaimed, in heart-broken accents, ‘what deplorable news!’

Léon said it was very bad.

‘And we do not yet know the worst of it. If it was only the defeat of the army, the loss of prestige, or even the conclusion of a humiliating peace, one would not need to despair of the future; but, alas! we are only at the beginning of our misfortunes. I greatly fear that we are about to enter upon a period of anarchy, and it may be of civil war. A Republican government, monsieur—for it is with that that we are menaced—is capable of any enormity. It will revolutionise everything; it will throw the whole machinery of the State out of gear; it will dismiss old and tried public functionaries—’

‘Bah!’ interrupted Madame de Trémonville; ‘you always look upon the black side of things. It is only the timid who will retire. A brave civilian, like a brave soldier, remains at his post.’

‘How is a man to remain at his post when he is turned out from it?’

‘He must not let himself be turned out. Those who, like you, have always held Liberal opinions, should have nothing to fear.’

‘I have always supported the Government,’ said M. de Trémonville, looking a little bewildered.

‘But when I tell you that you have always held Liberal opinions!’

M. de Trémonville sighed deeply, but said nothing, and his wife continued :

‘If you had a grain of spirit in you, you would know how to keep what you have got ; but as it is, you had better leave everything to me, as usual.’

‘Leave everything to you!’ groaned M. de Trémonville, rubbing his bald head despairingly. ‘Yes, that is what I have done—and see the consequences! Look, I beg of you, at the consequences. You have nearly ruined me by your extravagance; you have compromised my future by your ostentatious Imperialism; you have made me a laughing-stock by your coquetry, to use no harsher word—’

‘Allons, allons, mon ami!’

‘I insist upon being heard. M. le Marquis may take note of what I say if he pleases. For once I will speak. It is to you that I owe all my misfortunes. But for you, should I ever have left Bourbeville-sur-Creuse, where I enjoyed a higher salary and more consideration than I do here? Were we not compelled to solicit a change of appointment owing to the constant visits of M. le Préfet, and to Madame la Préfète’s declaration that she would tolerate such conduct no longer?’

‘Continue—pray continue. You humiliate yourself in insulting me.’

‘No, it is you who have humiliated me. I have always loved respectability myself,’ added poor M. de Trémonville, with a touch of pathos—‘respectability and a quiet life—and I abhor scandals. If I had had a wife who had shared my ideas, I should perhaps have been a better man to-day—certainly I should have been a richer one. But you, madame, you have blighted for ever a career which might have ended in honourable distinction, and—and a comfortable competence.’

And with that he trotted out of the room, head first, feeling probably that his courage would not hold out much longer.

‘What coarseness! what ingratitude!’ sighed Madame de Trémonville, as soon as he was gone. ‘You perceive, my friend, what I have to submit to. Shall we have some music now, and try to forget this unpleasant scene?’

But Léon said he must go; and took his leave rather stiffly. The little conjugal discussion to which he had just listened had in some degree served to open his eyes; and moreover, that allusion to the behaviour of the Préfet at Bourbeville sur-

Creuse struck him as eminently unsatisfactory. So he mounted his horse, and rode slowly home, musing sadly, as he went, upon the frailty of all human ideals.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH LÉON ASSERTS HIS INDEPENDENCE.

‘*Eh bien, mademoiselle, v’là que nous sommes une République !*’

Jeanne, waking in the morning with these words in her ears, sat up in bed, and became aware of Fanchette, who had brought in her bath a full half hour earlier than usual, fearing to be anticipated in the announcement of this startling piece of news, and who stood at the foot of the bed, grinning from ear to ear, as if the whole thing was the best joke in the world.

‘How terrible!’ exclaimed Jeanne; for she had been brought up to regard republicans with as holy a horror as did M. de Trémonville himself. ‘Are you sure there is no mistake, Fanchette?’

‘Mademoiselle, it is positive. Pierre Cauvin heard all about it down at the market, and says the whole town is *en fête*. It seems that a telegram came about midnight, to say that the Emperor was deposed, and that there was to be a new Government, composed of a number of individuals whose names I cannot recollect, only I know that Jules Favre is one of them. Mademoiselle remembers Jules Favre, who was here last year—an avocat, with a tangled head of hair—to think of his being in the Government! is it not amusing? Well, when the people in the town heard of this, the first thing they did was to have a salute fired; and then they went up to the Palace, where M. le Sous-Gouverneur was in bed and asleep, and they marched him down to the Place du Gouvernement, where he had to plant a tree of liberty, and cry, “*Vive la République !*” Poor gentleman! they say he pulled a long face over it; but what could he do? If he had refused, they would have been capable of throwing him into the harbour. And now, Pierre Cauvin says, they are pulling down all the eagles from above the shop-windows, and they have scratched out the names of the Boulevard de l’Impératrice and the Rue Napoléon, and everybody declares that we are to have no more military Governors, and

that very likely M. le Sous-Gouverneur will be sent away to France at once.'

Fanchette's political opinions were those of her master and mistress. She was a staunch royalist, and would have been very much offended at being taken for anything else. In principle, therefore, she considered a republic as a far worse form of government than an empire. But, notwithstanding this, she had all a Frenchwoman's mischievous glee at the overthrow of her rulers, and could not refrain from exclaiming a second time, at the conclusion of her narrative, 'Is it not amusing?'

To a large proportion of the French people, indeed, all revolutions are much what a successful barring-out of the masters used to be to English schoolboys; and it was with a strong admixture of this feeling that the Algerian republicans rejoiced over the events of September 4. They were good-humoured enough, upon the whole; and though, in the first flush of unfettered speech, some truculent menaces were hurled at the heads of Bonapartists and *réactionnaires*, nobody was injured.

This forbearance was probably owing in part to the fact that for several months after Sedan no such thing as a Bonapartist was discoverable, and partly also to the silent arguments of a couple of ironclads which lay in the port, and to the use of which the Port-Admiral was said to have pointedly referred when 'invited' by a few leading citizens to send in his resignation. Leading citizens, being above all things anxious to avert bloodshed, were fain, therefore, to let off surplus energy by revelling in the full freedom of the press, by filling the windows of the printshops with caricatures of the Imperial family, and by planting sickly trees of liberty in every open space—forgetting a little, in the enjoyment of these happy privileges, the calamities which had rendered them possible.

Even in the most strongly anti-republican circles, indignation with the fallen Empire overpowered, for a long time, all jealousy of its successors, and was a more frequent topic of conversation than the immediate prospects of the country. M. de Fontvieille, especially, could not contain himself when the name of Napoleon III. was mentioned, and would start to his feet, erect and rigid as a Jack-in-the-box, clenching his little fists, and shrieking '*Ah br-r-rigand!*' What annoyed him more than anything else was the statement made in the newspapers, that the Emperor had driven over into the Prussian lines smoking a cigarette. That the man should have been capable of enjoying tobacco at that supreme moment seemed to

him almost more infamous than his failure to 'find death at the head of his army;' and when later intelligence announced that the royal residence of Wilhelmshöhe had been assigned to the captive, and that Queen Augusta had sent him her own cook, what further proof could anyone want that France had been deliberately sold to the enemy?

The crop of queerly-named and still more queerly-written journals which, in Algeria as in all other parts of French territory, sprang up after the declaration of the Republic, as thickly as mushrooms after a thunderstorm, unanimously adopted this view. The *Cri du Peuple*, the *Solidarité Algérienne*, and the *Colon en Colère* were all able to tell their readers, down to the last centime, the sum received by 'the man of Sedan' and his accomplices for their treachery, and were, in fact, so full of information upon this and other subjects of a like interesting nature, that they had but little space left for recording the movements of the German armies, which all this time were plodding steadily on towards Paris. And so, in due course, came the complete investment of the capital, and M. Jules Favre's proclamation, describing his futile interview with Prince Bismarck at Ferrières, which, as it was a high-sounding composition, the Algerian papers published *in extenso*.

This artless effusion of the unlucky Minister for Foreign Affairs has been sufficiently laughed over in its time, and, by reason of a striking phrase or two, has little chance of obtaining a kindly oblivion. A statesman, who, not content with displaying his hopeless ineptitude in the Cabinet, must needs blazon it forth to the world; who, by way of reply to suggested conditions for an armistice, 'turns aside to devour the tears that choke him;' who imagines that glowing language is likely to have the smallest effect upon a successful, hard-headed Prussian, and whose notions of propitiatory sacrifice do not include 'an inch of our territory, nor a stone of our fortresses,' is perhaps a legitimate subject for the mirth of practical people; but, for all that, there was a simple eloquence about the composition which found its way to the hearts of the French people. Jules Favre's words were caught up and echoed throughout the length and breadth of the land; and in truth the humour of them (if humour there be) consists less in the despairing defiance they breathed than in the fact that those stones and inches had to be ceded, in the sequel, by the very man who had so ardently vowed to retain them; while as for tears, they are but

an expression of emotion held to be unseemly by northern nations, but not so considered by the Latin races of our own day, nor by the Greeks of old time.

Léon, when he read M. Favre's circular, was very nearly crying over it himself, out of sheer mortification. Ever since September 4 he had been keenly alive to the shame of his present life of inglorious security; and if anything had been wanting to complete his discontent, it would have been supplied by the hastily written lines in which Saint-Luc recounted his escape from the captured army at Sedan, and his safe reception, after many perils and adventures, into the corps of General Vinoy. Thus far Léon had been prevailed upon to remain where he was, less by the Duchess's piteous pleadings than by the assurance of all his friends that peace was imminent and inevitable; but now he was determined that he would be cajoled in this way no longer. That the struggle would be prolonged to the uttermost was beyond a doubt. People were already beginning to talk of a *levée en masse*; and a time might come when he would be forced to take his share of it, with or without his consent. Should it be said of him that he had declined to fight for his country till his country had had to drag him into the ranks?

Primed with the unanswerable arguments which such thoughts suggested, he sought out his sister, to whom he still instinctively turned in moments of emergency, and, without waste of words, declared his purpose.

'Jeanne,' said he, 'I am going to join the army immediately.'

Jeanne was sitting in a cool corner of the garden, upon a marble bench, shielded from the sun by a tall cypress hedge and some overspreading umbrella pines. She neither turned her head nor answered, but gazed absently at the glittering sea beneath her and the clearly marked line of the horizon, as if she had heard nothing. Léon, who was familiar with all her moods, knew that with her silence by no means implied consent, and, to save time, replied to her objections before they were uttered.

'What is the use of making the worst of things?' he asked. 'The chances are greatly against my being killed; anybody will tell you that; and, in point of fact, all that can be urged against my going simply amounts to this—that you and the Duchess will be uneasy and anxious about me while I am away. You know quite well that I do not think that a matter of no importance; but surely you will allow that it is more important still

that I should not be disgraced in the eyes of every man of my acquaintance, and——’

‘No one would dare to insinuate that you had disgraced yourself,’ interposed Jeanne, quickly. ‘You have your regiment here; and you might be called upon to serve, any day, if the Arabs should rise, as I am told they are very likely to do.’

‘They are not in the least likely to do any such thing,’ returned Léon, slapping his leg impatiently with his cane; ‘and even if they did, I believe the Duchess would at once find some excellent reason for my staying at home.’

‘The Duchess is ill, and is growing very old. She is convinced that, if you left us now, she would never see you again. It is only natural that she should feel so; and I think you ought to take that into consideration.’

‘So I do; but I have myself to consider as well. One or other of us must give way; and admitting that she has every ground for her fears, which of us would sacrifice most—she, by bidding me good-bye now instead of a few months hence, or I, by giving every shopboy in France who had carried a chassepôt during the war the right to sneer at me for the rest of my days? The Duchess means to be kind, but she is a little selfish, as all old people are, and it is useless for me to try and make her understand that I do not choose to undergo all the hardships of a private soldier’s life for my own amusement. With you it is different. You have good sense enough to see that it is simply my duty—and a rather unpleasant duty too—to go and fight; and I think you ought to help instead of opposing me. Why, you let Saint-Luc go without a word!’

This was an argument to which Jeanne found it rather difficult to reply; and indeed, though sorely against her will, she could not but inwardly acknowledge that the young man’s instincts were right. She was weak enough, however, to put in the old plea of the probability of peace.

‘That chance is finally disposed of, as the papers will convince you,’ answered Léon, pulling the *Cri du Peuple* out of his pocket, and dropping it on to her lap. ‘Read that, and you will see that we do not mean to give in until we are exterminated. Now I must go, for I have a great many instructions to give to Pierre Cauvin; but remember, Jeanne, when I broach the subject of my joining the army, at dinner this evening, I shall expect you to support me; and if you really love me, you will do so.’

And with that he marched off. A year ago he would

hardly have ventured to speak so peremptorily ; but he was out of leading-strings now, and had begun to feel all the conscious superiority of a very young man over the womankind of his household.

Jeanne made no effort to retain him. She saw that he would go to France—perhaps even that he ought to go—and that combating his resolution would but serve to strengthen it. But that did not prevent her heart from sinking with apprehension, nor her imagination from conjuring up a host of dire possibilities ; for though in most matters she had courage enough for any two, she was a veritable coward where Léon's safety was concerned. If the destinies of France had been entrusted to her hands at that moment, it is to be feared that peace would have been purchased at the price of as large a cession of inches and stones as the invader might have thought fit to demand. Mechanically she unfolded the newspaper which Léon had thrown to her, to see how far popular opinion might seem disposed towards a pacific policy.

Upon this point the *Cri du Peuple* was perfectly explicit. There was to be no yielding, no hesitation, and neither peace nor truce till the enemy should be driven back across the frontier ; the resources of the country, both in lives and money, were to be taxed, if need should be, to the utmost ; and all able-bodied men (except, of course, such as were required for civil employment and the cultured few whose duty compelled them to stay at home and write leading articles) were to be called under arms forthwith. The *Cri du Peuple* considered that the hour had now struck for the converting of every citizen (always with the above-named exceptions) into a soldier, and was further of opinion that the Bonapartists should be placed in the front rank. These editorial utterances filled the first page of the sheet ; the second was taken up by Jules Favre's circular, and by appropriate comments thereon ; and the third contained an article written by a gentleman of most uncompromising views, who, to use his own forcible words, ' was convinced that the peace of the world could only be secured by the final extinction of the traitors, cowards, and bandits who have too long usurped the proud position of rulers of mankind.'

'In the sad circumstances in which Europe now finds itself,' continued this moderate reformer, 'we believe that we are fulfilling a high duty of morality and humanity in suggesting to our Government that the following prices be placed upon the heads of the monsters whose names we append :—

	FR.
Charles-Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte	25,000
Bismarck (the enemy of the human race)	25,000
William, King of Prussia	25,000
Moltke	15,000
Werder (<i>le bourreau de Strasbourg</i>)	15,000
Emile Ollivier (of the light heart)	10,000
Clément Duvernois (more than he is worth, but no honest citizen would soil his hands by touching the wretch for less)	5,000

From the above excerpt (which, by the way, is no caricature) it will be seen that the tigerish element which, according to Voltaire, enters so largely into the disposition of his countrymen, was not wanting among the contributors to the *Cri du Peuple*. The last page of that spirited print offered a very fair example of the simious side of the national character, consisting, as it did, of a series of mischievous and gleeful attacks upon the reputation of local dignitaries. Under the title of '*Les Fonctionnaires de l'Empire : leurs hauts faits et gestes*,' Jeanne came upon a paragraph headed, '*Bonjean, soi-disant de Trémonville*,' in which our old friend was somewhat roughly handled. 'The son of a simple peasant, who earned his living in the hamlet of Trémonville in Dauphiné, some fifty years ago, partly by the sale of his own pigs and fowls, and partly by stealing those of his neighbours, the young Baptiste Bonjean early displayed an aptitude for thieving, lying, and fawning upon his superiors. Under the régime from which we have just escaped he could have possessed no better credentials for advancement in life.'

Such were the opening sentences of a concise biography, which, after following the juvenile delinquent through the various phases of his successful career, imputing to him enough crimes to have merited a sentence of penal servitude for life, and incidentally disposing of his wife's character in terms whose plainness left nothing to be desired, wound up with a significant warning that the rule of adventurers of this stamp would be tolerated no longer. 'We are the more desirous,' concluded the writer, 'that the citizen Bonjean should at once learn the necessity for withdrawing his dishonoured person from our town, inasmuch as we have been given to understand that he now professes republican principles, and has been sedulously exerting the occult influences which such reptiles know how to use to get himself confirmed in the appointment which he at present disgraces. Should he succeed in his design, the people of Algiers will, without any doubt, find a summary means of getting rid of him.'

With a smile that ended in a sigh, Jeanne let the paper slide to the ground.

The truculent absurdities of a half-educated scribbler were of no great importance in themselves, but they served to show which way the wind blew, and that republican was as little disposed as imperial France to look truth in the face. There could be no question but that the war would be prosecuted indefinitely, nor any doubt but that Léon would have to take his part in it.

Oddly enough, it was not death nor wounds that Jeanne dreaded for her brother—these were contingencies which she could not bring herself to contemplate—but the hardships and privations which he must needs undergo, and for which she imagined him to be in no way fitted. As a matter of fact, the young man was as strong as a horse, and as well able to make his dinner off the heterogeneous contents of a camp-kettle, and to sleep on the bare ground afterwards, as any soldier in the French service; but this Jeanne could not see. Her love for her brother had always been of a more or less maternal nature; and now, calling to mind all the minor maladies—colds in the head, toothaches, and what not—which had afflicted him from time to time, she fell to drawing harrowing mental pictures of his sufferings from one or other of these terrible ailments in a wintry, inhospitable land, with no one to pet and comfort him under them, till her heart overflowed with pity and her eyes with tears.

And so she sat idly on her shady bench, while the heavy-footed hours crept by, and the sun struck downwards in his might, shrivelling the brown herbage, and making the air quiver, and the voices of Nature were dumb, and all things were pervaded by a brooding sense of depression which northern people can hardly understand as associated with fair weather.

After a time there came an audible stir from the direction of the house; a sound of hurrying footsteps, of eager, subdued voices; and then a horse was led out from the stable, and somebody mounted him and galloped away, along the high-road, towards the town. Jeanne started to her feet at once, feeling instinctively that something had gone wrong. There was nothing unusual in what she had heard; in fact, hardly a day passed without a groom being despatched to Algiers upon some commission or other; but when misfortune is in the air, it has a way of making itself felt through the most ordinary channels, and Jeanne was scarcely surprised when Fanchette came hasten-

ing out to meet her, wringing her hands and apostrophising all the saints in the calendar.

‘Oh, mademoiselle!’ gasped the old woman, incoherently, ‘what a misfortune! Who could have foreseen it?—ah, how terrible!—Madame la Duchesse——’

Jeanne put her aside, and stepped into the house. At the foot of the staircase Léon met her, looking very pale and grave.

‘We have got her into bed,’ he said, ‘but I don’t know what we ought to do till the doctor comes. No—do not go up yet; you would be shocked perhaps, and you can do no good. Her face is so horribly changed, and one side——’

Jeanne waited to hear no more, but hurried upstairs into the bedroom, where, with a group of frightened and helpless women-servants round her bed, the poor old Duchess lay, stricken down by paralysis.

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHANGES.

Poor old Duchess! her long life journey was drawing towards a close at last. For her not many more suns would rise and set. For her there was an end of planning and plotting, of gossip and tittle-tattle, of jewels and laces, of well-meant ostentatious charities, of patronising humble folks and smiling upon great ones. Yet a few days, and she would have passed over into the ranks of that silent, unseen multitude to whom ‘the reed is as the oak.’ The doctor came up post-haste, but she was beyond help of doctors, as the good man himself was the first to admit, blowing his nose loudly the while, with a many-coloured pocket-handkerchief.

‘Ah, Monsieur le Marquis,’ said he sorrowfully, ‘I am completely upset. A lady so noble, so venerable! Our consolation must be that she has been spared to reach a great age; and that in spite of a constitution far from robust. I do not say it to vaunt myself, though it is true that Madame la Duchesse has availed herself of my poor services for many years past. Alas, monsieur, in her I lose the most amiable of my patients.’

He might have added the most lucrative too; and very likely this aspect of the misfortune did not fail to present itself

to him, seeing that doctors are, after all, but men, and very generally have families to support. Some directions and prescriptions he gave, as in duty bound; but he was careful to mention that they would be of very little use. The end might come immediately, or in the course of a day or two; it was not likely, in any case, to be delayed beyond a week. Under the circumstances, one could hardly wish that it should be. And so the doctor took his leave, and scrambled into the shabby leather-curtained waggonette that was waiting for him at the door.

'*Au pas, malheureux, au pas !*' Léon heard him exclaim, in a strident whisper, as the coachman whipped up his rough little horse. 'Have you no entrails, then, that you drive away as from a wedding?'

The Duchess did not die that day, nor the next, and gradually recovered consciousness, but not speech. The household was disorganised, as all households are at such times. There was not much to be done, yet nobody liked to go about his ordinary avocations. The servants collected in the corridors, and talked together in awe-struck undertones; M. de Fontvieille hurried in and out, upon one needless errand or another; and Léon wandered uneasily about the house, stealing on tiptoe, every now and then, into the darkened room where Jeanne sat, night and day, by the bedside of the dying woman.

Of what was the poor old soul thinking, as she lay there through the long hot hours, her eyes wandering restlessly over wall and ceiling, and one withered hand for ever plucking at the bed-clothes? More than once, when Léon was beside her, she struggled hard to speak, and looked at him with a piteous, entreating gaze which troubled the lad a little.

'What is it? What does she mean?' he whispered to his sister, but Jeanne avoided answering the question. She had a feeling that it would be hardly generous to urge, at this time, what she believed to be the Duchess's wish, seeing that it was identical with her own. M. de Fontvieille was less scrupulous. 'The cause of her agitation is evident enough,' he said. 'Promise her that you will remain at home, and take care of your sister, when she is gone, poor, dear lady, and you will see that she will become tranquil at once. Come, my boy, you cannot refuse to perform so simple an act of duty, and to soothe the last moments of one who has been as much as a mother to you.'

Léon, however, did refuse. Certainly, he said, he would promise to do his duty towards his sister to the best of his

ability. More than that he could not do, and more ought not to be asked of him. For the sake of no one, living or dead, would he bind himself to abstain from striking a blow for his country.

So, if that were what poor old Madame de Breuil wanted, she had to do without it, as she had had to do without many another thing in the course of her long pilgrimage.

'This world is but a poor place,' sighed old Fanchette, with her apron up to her eyes—'nothing but vexation and disappointment and pain, from beginning to end. Madame la Duchesse is more to be envied than we who remain behind. Ah, if we had all lived as she has done, there would be little need to say masses for the repose of our souls when our own time came. Heaven be praised! she will soon be an angel in Paradise.'

I don't know whether the Duchess was very anxious to be an angel, or in any great hurry to enter Paradise. Once, when Jeanne, in a despondent mood, had expressed a doubt whether life was worth having, the old lady had assured her that in a few years' time she would certainly answer the question in the affirmative. 'You young people are fractious and impatient. If life does not bring you exactly what you want, you cry out that you are tired of it. For me life is like an old friend from whom I can take occasional rough usage without murmuring, and whom I should love for old acquaintance sake, if for no other reason.' Now she had to bid adieu to her old friend for ever; to leave 'the warm precincts of the cheerful day,' and set out, shivering and alone, for some unknown land. Very possibly the outlook may not have seemed to her an altogether smiling one. However, as she never spoke again, nobody had any opportunity of arriving at the state of her mind, and the priests who came to administer the viaticum to her declared that her exemplary life had found a fitting conclusion in the most edifying of death-beds.

And so, at length, Louise, Duchesse de Breuil, passed away, fortified by the sacraments of the Church. She had been a well-known woman in her day, but had outlived name, fame, beauty, and friends by many, many years, and the news of her death affected nobody beyond her own home circle, unless it was the Duc de Breuil, who considered that he had been kept out of a portion of his rightful income by her for an inexcusably long time.

Jeanne took the loss of her kindly, fussy old duenna

terribly to heart. Long as she had foreseen the approach of the inevitable event, and calmly as she had often spoken of it, yet, when it came, it almost stunned her by its suddenness, and overwhelmed her with that feeling of yearning regret and remorse to which few people can be strangers. Now that it was too late to make any amends, she acknowledged to herself humbly and sadly that she had never done the Duchess justice. She remembered, with many a pang of shame, how little allowance she had made for the querulousness of old age and for a character differing at every point from her own. All her bygone rejections of proffered confidences, all her cold or scornful speeches and occasional little shabby acts, rose up before her in proportions which they would undoubtedly never have assumed if the subject of them had been alive and well. Everybody knows the sensation. It passes away with time, like all human sensations, good and bad, and I dare say a great many of us manage to get over it in the course of a week. Jeanne, who felt more deeply than most, did not rally so quickly. Had she been less unhappy on her own score, at this time, no doubt the blow would not have fallen so heavily upon her; as it was, she seemed utterly crushed and altered by it. She would sit for hours, silent and motionless, with her hands before her, unable to settle down to any occupation, and forgetful even of the household duties which had hitherto been as a second nature to her; she could hardly be prevailed upon to eat anything; and any trifle—a passing allusion, the sight of the Duchess's empty chair, or of a sunshade lying where the old lady had laid it down, for the last time, on the hall table—sufficed to send her into a paroxysm of hysterical weeping.

Léon, albeit 'profoundly touched'—to use his own expression—by the spectacle of so much sensibility, ended by finding it a little irritating. Grief over their joint bereavement was, of course, highly becoming—he himself had shed a 'torrent of tears' on the day of the funeral—but that grief should be thus prolonged, day after day, and week after week, was surely neither natural nor needful; and what made it especially inconvenient was that, while Jeanne continued in this frame of mind, neither he nor M. de Fontvieille liked to trouble her with those discussions as to her future manner of life which the circumstances rendered urgent, and in which both of them felt that her voice ought to be heard. The upshot of it was that they took their own line of action, deeming it, upon the whole, most advisable to keep the person principally concerned in the

dark until they should be able to lay some definite proposition before her.

This moment came towards the end of October, when M. Gambetta, newly descended from his balloon, was working with might and main at the formation of a new national army; when Saint-Luc, who had turned up at Tours in the nick of time to receive a colonel's commission, was collecting and drilling a rough corps of *éclaireurs-à-cheval*; when a sudden revival of hope was spreading through the length and breadth of the land, and when Metz, alas! was tottering to its fall.

Algiers and its neighbourhood lay quivering and gasping under the scorching heat of a sirocco which had already lasted two days, blowing not, as in the winter time, in furious gusts, but in steady, slowly-moving waves of red-hot air—if such an expression be permissible. The sky overhead was of a dull coppery hue; the mountains were veiled; the sun shone dimly through an atmosphere impregnated with a hovering mist of fine sand, which settled and penetrated everywhere—even through the closed windows and shutters of the *salon* where Jeanne, utterly prostrated both in mind and body, lay idly stretched upon a sofa. To her entered M. de Fontvieille, exhausted but unconquered, and seating himself at her side, drew a bundle of letters from his pocket, and cleared his voice with the unmistakable air of one who has a statement to make.

‘I fear, my dear child,’ he began, ‘that I do not find you much disposed to talk over some matters of importance.’

‘Not much,’ murmured Jeanne faintly.

‘No; it is not expected that you should be. Still, business is business, and correspondence must not be left unanswered. Has it ever occurred to you that, under present circumstances, you can hardly continue to live as you are now living?—that the laws of society do not permit a young lady to dispense with some—protector?’

‘Have I not got Léon?’

‘It is of a protector of your own sex that you stand in need. And besides, Léon cannot be with you much longer. In point of fact, M. de Saint-Luc has offered to find a place for him in his regiment; and I believe I may say he has accepted the offer.’

‘He might have told me about it,’ said Jeanne. ‘I have never been selfish with him. I should not have attempted to keep him here, now that the Duchess is gone——’

‘Dear mademoiselle, neither you nor anyone else could have

kept him here. The young man has got the war-fever ; and I know of no remedy for that disease except shells and bullets, and even they do not cure everybody. What would you have ? We were all young once.'

'I am not complaining of Léon—nor of anything. What is it that you wish me to do ?'

'I was about to tell you. As soon as I saw that Léon was determined to leave us, and that it would be necessary to place you under the care of some relation or friend up to the time of your marriage, I wrote to your cousins in Auvergne, laying the case before them, and asking them whether they would be prepared to offer you a temporary home, adding, at the same time, that you would willingly contribute whatever sum they might think fit towards the defrayal of any increased household expenditure which your visit might entail. Their answer was not of the most cordial. They said it would give them great pleasure to receive you, but that you would be badly lodged, as the château was unfortunately under repair. They thought it only right to add that, in the present lamentable state of the country, their own plans must be very uncertain, and that they might be compelled to leave France at any moment. Finally, they assured me that, poor as they were, and heavy as the cost would probably be of entertaining one who was not accustomed to their rough country fare, it was not their habit to send in a bill to their guests. Léon and I agreed that, before continuing negotiations with these civil-spoken people, we would address ourselves to your mother's sister, Madame Ashley. Ah, this time, for example, we fell upon a human being ! Here is her response, which arrived this morning. Its French is original, its style is not precisely that of the Academy, but its sentiments are those of a woman of heart. Excellent and respectable lady ! Here is her letter ; read it for yourself.

'Holmhurst, Surrey, October 1870.

'MON CHER MONSIEUR,

'Je viens de recevoir votre lettre, et j'apprends avec sincère regret la mort de Madame la Duchesse de Breuil. Je n'ai jamais eu l'avantage de connaître cette dame personnellement, mais j'ai bien souvent entendu parler d'elle, et je ne doute point qu'elle ne soit entrée, comme vous dites, dans le royaume des cieux, où je compte rencontrer, un jour, tous les bons chrétiens, quoique pas catholique-romaine moi-même.

'Quant à la chère nièce que je ne connais que de nom, je

n'ai assurément pas besoin de vous dire qu'elle sera mille fois la bien-venue chez nous, que mes filles ont grande envie de faire sa connaissance, et que plus longtemps elle restera avec nous, plus nous serons contents. Je voudrais bien qu'il fût possible que son mariage eût lieu de cette maison. Ce serait pour nous une belle fête, et nous avons même dans le voisinage une très-gentille petite chapelle catholique-romaine où la cérémonie pourrait être solennisée. Mais pour ça il faudra attendre la fin de cette malheureuse guerre. Dieu veuille que M. de Saint-Luc en revienne sain et sauf, ainsi que mon bon neveu Léon, que nous avons tous appris à aimer pendant son séjour en Angleterre.

'En attendant, Jeanne sera ici comme chez elle. Nous ferons de notre mieux pour la rendre confortable, et j'ose promettre qu'elle n'aura à se plaindre de rien, si ce n'est du climat, qui, du reste, est moins mauvais qu'on ne le prétend. Dites-lui, avec mon meilleur amour (c'est une expression anglaise qui se comprend mais ne se traduit pas) que nous la recevrons de grand cœur.

'Excusez, monsieur, mon mauvais français. Du temps de ma jeunesse je parlais passablement bien votre langue, mais depuis lors j'ai oublié bien des choses, et ce qui est le plus ennuyeux, c'est que je ne puis trouver, dans ce moment, ni mon dictionnaire, ni mon Noël et Chapsal. C'est égal—vous n'en comprendrez pas moins qu'il me tarde d'embrasser la fille de ma pauvre chère sœur, et que je vous suis bien reconnaissante de toute la bonté que vous avez eue pour elle.

'Recevez, monsieur, l'assurance de mon amitié sincère.

'ANNE ASHLEY.

'M. Ashley fait dire qu'il ira volontiers prendre sa nièce à Marseille : le voyage ne lui fera que du bien. Il le prolongerait même jusqu'en Algérie, s'il le fallait, mais pour vous dire la vérité, il craint un peu le mal de mer.'

This hearty missive came like a whiff of cool English air to Jeanne as she sat in the stifling atmosphere of her African home. She read it through twice, smiling a little as she did so, for the first time since the Duchess's death ; but when she folded it up and returned it to M. de Fontvieille, she shook her head.

'Dear child,' said he persuasively, 'do not let prejudice deter you from accepting the hospitality of these good English people. It is true that Madame Ashley expresses herself a

little like a provincial, and places a superfluous *r* in *mariage*; but we must not therefore conclude that she is either an uneducated or a vulgar person. On the contrary, I detect in this letter traces of a refinement, blunted, it may be, by rural surroundings, still——

‘I was not thinking of anything of that kind,’ interrupted Jeanne. ‘It seems to me that my aunt is as charming as she is kind. But I could not stay at Holmhurst.’

‘And why not, if you please?’ asked M. de Fontvieille, with a shade of impatience in his voice.

‘Because I had rather not.’

‘That is not a reason.’

‘Is it necessary that I should give my reason for disliking to go to England?’

‘No; but it would at least show some consideration for those who love you, and are trying to do their best for you, if you did. And then I should be glad to know what alternative course you can propose.’

‘Well, there is an alternative. The convent is open to me; and I should be very happy with the good sisters till—till I was wanted in the world again.’

‘Impossible!’ exclaimed M. de Fontvieille, with a gesture of horror. ‘You, to whom liberty and the free air are as meat and drink, to pass interminable days between the four white walls of that prison-house! Why, you would die of it. No one can accuse me of undervaluing the benefits of religious life and of occasional periods of seclusion. I admit that, by stretching a point or two, you might get through a month of matins, complines, vespers, needlework, and the rest, without pining away, like a skylark in a cage; but when it came to be a question of six months, or a year—for who can say how long it may take our armies to drive the Prussians over the frontier?—when this house was shut up, and you had no refuge to escape to——’

‘I should not mind,’ answered Jeanne wearily. ‘What I want is rest and peace.’

‘No; you want change and amusement. But let that pass. The fact is that neither Léon nor I like the idea of your remaining in Africa at all just now. The times are bad, and will be worse, if I am not mistaken and misinformed. Do you know how many trained soldiers we have in the country? I do not; for troops have been moved hither and thither, during the last few weeks, embarking here, disembarking there, marching in

and marching out, till nobody can say anything about them, except that they are no longer visible. What I do know is, that in the province of Oran, in the province of Constantine, and over yonder in Kabylia, *messieurs les indigènes* are growing restless. They have heard that the Empire has fallen, and to their simple notions the Empire is France. For my own part, I have always liked the Arabs; they are a brave race, and we have been educating them into a loyal one; but they have still many things to learn—such as, for instance, the possible existence of a government without a head, the criminal folly of insurrection, and perhaps also the inviolability of convents. Ever since the news of Sedan came, I have observed that the natives have adopted a certain manner of looking at me as I pass. I, who am but an old man, with one foot in the grave, shrug my shoulders, and look at them in return; but I have taken to carrying a revolver, and I have sent away my jewels into a place of safety. It is a measure of precaution for which I hope you will live to thank me one day; and that is why I must strenuously oppose your project of immuring yourself at El Biar.’

‘As you please,’ answered Jeanne, too tired and too indifferent to argue. ‘I will go to my cousins in Auvergne, then.’

‘Where you will be as welcome as snow in June! I thought you more reasonable, Jeanne. What objection can you possibly have to availing yourself of the kindness of these excellent Ashleys?’

‘Dear M. de Fontvieille, do not be impatient with me. I am so tired, and so—so unhappy.’ Jeanne’s lip quivered, and she stopped short; but recovering herself immediately, she resumed, in a steadier voice: ‘I am ready to do whatever you and Léon think best; and my reason for not wishing to go to England is not of any great importance, after all. It was only that Mr. Barrington lives close to the Ashleys, and that I did not wish to meet him again so soon.’

M. de Fontvieille was at once mollified and delighted. A touch of sentiment appealed to his tenderest feelings. ‘Poor child!—poor child!’ he murmured, patting her gently on the shoulder. ‘You have not forgotten, then; and I, old fool that I am! have been wrongfully accusing you of heartlessness. I ask your pardon; I offer you my respectful sympathy—I, who have passed, in my time, along the path which you are now treading, and who know all its rough places. Go, dear mademoiselle, go without fear; you will suffer, perhaps, but less

than you expect. A *bourgeoise* placed as you are would do well to hesitate; people of our race are differently built. "*L'asiour n'est qu'un plaisir, l'honneur est un devoir*," as Corneille says; and I would answer for it with my life that you will never forget, in the presence of Mr. Barrington, that you are the affianced bride of the Vicomte de Saint-Luc.'

Either Jeanne's dormant pride was aroused by this little piece of fanfaronnade, or else she was too weary to resist pressure. She promised to write to Mrs. Ashley by the next post, and to make immediate preparations for her journey.

So M. de Fontvieille went home with his mind at ease, and meeting Léon on the threshold, told him that all was satisfactorily arranged.

'With a little tact and discretion one can always bring reasonable people to understand their duty,' said the old gentleman, modestly exultant.

'I'm very much obliged to you, monsieur,' answered Léon, as he entered the house, and bade his valuable ally good-evening. He, too, had his preparations to make, his last instructions to give, his last words to say, before leaving the old home to which it might well be that he would never return again.

CHAPTER XXV

IN WHICH LÉON PLAYS THE PART OF BAYARD TO A LIMITED AUDIENCE.

PREPARATIONS for a prolonged absence from home—packing up of clothes, sorting and burning of papers, paying of outstanding bills, and all the other troublesome little duties which crop up thick and fast at such times—are not, in themselves, very enjoyable; but in so far as they serve to dull the pain of parting, they must be acknowledged to be blessings in disguise. Léon had his hands so full during the brief remaining period of his liberty, that neither he nor Jeanne had much leisure for reflection; and this was, perhaps, just as well for both of them.

The time, indeed, proved shorter even than the embryo soldier had anticipated; for on the very day after that on which M. de Fontvieille had divulged his intentions, he received orders from Tours to join his new regiment within a week;

and thus a great deal of business had to be crowded into a very few hours, while not a little had to be neglected altogether.

Pierre Cauvin, an honest but obstinate and punctilious old person, did not help much to expedite matters. He insisted upon it that he must have categorical instructions from his young master upon a variety of points which might easily have been left to his own discretion; where difficulties did not already exist he managed to create them; and it was owing to his representations that Léon's last day was spent far away from home, upon the stud-farm at Koléah, inspecting horses, and authorising the sale of all such as were in a fit condition to fetch their proper value.

It was not until after nightfall that Léon, dusty and weary, rode into the stable-yard of the Campagne de Mersac. Jeanne saw him arrive from the window of her bedroom, where she had been busy, all the afternoon, over the hopeless task of compressing every article of necessity and luxury she could think of into the modest limits of a soldier's kit. She saw him dismount, and hastily wash his face and hands at the pump, while a groom brushed him down; and then, to her great disappointment, a fresh horse was led out, and he swung himself into the saddle, and rode away again. After a few minutes a scrap of paper was brought to her, on which he had scribbled: 'No time to come in. One or two more things that I must do. Back in an hour, I hope.'

'Poor boy!' murmured Jeanne, 'he will tire himself out.' And then she went downstairs, dragged out the most comfortable arm-chair she could find on to the verandah, and placed a table beside it, with cigars and ice and wine, ready for his return. She would doubtless have done as much had she been aware of the nature of her brother's errand; but she would have done it with a somewhat heavier heart: and it was probably because he was aware of this that Léon had thoughtfully abstained from mentioning that one of the few precious hours still at his disposition was to be devoted to Madame de Trémonville.

The sirocco had blown itself out now, and had ended with a short, sharp shower, a welcome herald of the longed for autumnal rains. Filmy wreaths of wind-driven cloud were sailing high beneath the stars, a grateful smell of moisture was rising from the parched earth, and the outlines of all distant objects were clear against the sky, as Léon cantered over the hills towards Mustapha. There were lights in the drawing-room of

the villa before which he drew rein at length ; and the servant who answered his ring informed him that madame was alone, and would receive. Madame, who was seated at the piano, did not rise upon the entrance of her admirer.

‘Ah, it is you,’ said she, smiling and nodding at him. ‘And so you are really going to the war, and you have come to bid me good-bye. Do you know that is very pretty of you?’

And, striking a few chords, she began to sing half mockingly—

Beau chevalier, qui partez pour la guerre,
Qu’allez vous faire
Si loin d’ici ?
Voyez-vous pas que la nuit est profonde,
Et que le monde
N’est que souci ?

But as Léon put a very grave face upon it, she broke off, took him by both hands, and forcing him gently on to a footstool at her feet, looked straight into his eyes, with a gaze that might have troubled an older man, sighing ever so slightly the while.

‘So then it is all over,’ she murmured. ‘Go, Monsieur le Marquis, go, and forget your friends. We, on our side, shall try to forget you too. That is what you wish, is it not?’

‘I wish you to forget me, madame!’ ejaculated Léon, reproachfully. ‘You cannot be speaking seriously.’

‘If you cared about the matter at all, you would not be in such a hurry to go away,’ returned Madame de Trémonville, averting her head.

‘I am not in a hurry. I have remained here so long already that I am ashamed of myself. If I go now at last, it is because no honourable man could act otherwise. It is because—’

‘Ah, bah!’ interrupted the lady, with a sudden change of mood. ‘Spare me the rest of the speech, I have heard it so often! I see you coming with your patriotic hymns—“Mourir pour la patrie,”—“Aux armes, citoyens!” All that is very well for the cafés-chantants, but it has gone out of fashion in drawing-rooms, let me tell you.’

‘I have heard you sing the air yourself, madame,’ remarked Léon, rather hurt.

‘In July last? Very likely. It was more or less of a novelty then, and we had an army which was going to march to Berlin, *tambour battant*. Now that every man in the country has been shouting, every woman screeching, every little boy whistling, and every dog barking the Marseillaise incessantly

for three months, I am beginning to grow a little tired of it; and instead of the army, which exists no longer, we have the undisciplined, mutinous rabble which you are so eager to join. I wish you joy of your comrades.'

'Such as they are, they have taken up arms against the invader.'

'And they show their contempt for him by turning their backs upon him whenever he appears. Do not scowl at me, it is not polite. I know that there are brave men, and men of family amongst this *canaille*; but, for any good they are likely to do, they might as well have remained at home. The game was lost long ago; and it is time that we stopped playing, and paid the stakes. By the way, there was a rumour in the town to-day that Bazaine had capitulated to the Prince Frederick-Charles.'

'Impossible!'

'Not in the least—nor even improbable. For my part, I hope the news may be true. It will bring us nearer to the end.'

This was more than Léon could endure. Many things had combined to make him doubt, of late, whether Madame de Trémonville were quite the ideal being he had once imagined her; but he had never, until now, believed her capable of rejoicing over the misfortunes of her country.

'Madame,' said he, getting up with a tragic air which nearly upset the gravity of his entertainer, 'I hope that you do not mean what you say; but whether you do or not, I cannot stay here to listen to such words. You spoke just now of my forgetting you. That I shall never do; but I wish to have nothing but what is agreeable associated with you in my memory; and for that reason I shall now, with your permission, bid you good-bye.'

Madame de Trémonville's answer to this dignified address was of a practical and effective kind. She started to her feet, laid a tiny, dimpled hand on each of Léon's broad shoulders, and compelled him to subside again on the footstool from which he had just arisen, like a Jack-in-the-box. She did not choose that Léon should go away in a huff, for two reasons: firstly, because she was greedy of admiration, and would almost as soon have parted with one of her diamonds as with the dullest of her adorers; secondly, because she had wit enough to see that, in those days, it behoved wise people to have friends in all parties. Who could tell what future might lie hidden behind the mists of the present? Henri V might be reigning, by the grace of

God, in France before the year was out; and then the Marquis de Mersac might have a nice little appointment, or possibly a big one, to offer to anyone who should have been fortunate enough to gain his good opinion.

‘Sit down, my brave knight,’ said she, in a tone of soft raillery, ‘and do not quarrel with a poor, ignorant woman, who knows very little about battles and politics. The Seigneur de Bayard, whom you resemble in many points, would never have permitted himself to speak so roughly to a lady. But he has been dead these four hundred years; and since his time we have forgotten much, and also learnt some few things—amongst others, that it is a crime to sacrifice life uselessly. I am as good a patriot as another—as M. Gambetta, for instance, or yourself—but it is not forbidden, while loving one’s country, to love also—what am I saying?—to feel some anxiety about the safety of one’s friends.’

‘Oh, madame! do you mean—can you mean?—’

‘What? That I should be sorry if you were to meet with Bayard’s fate? I don’t say no.’

Léon was seated a bare three inches above the level of the ground, his long legs gathered up uncomfortably before him, and his nose resting on his knees. It was neither an easy nor a graceful attitude, and it occurred to him to change it.

A moment later, the unsuspecting M. de Trémonville, hurrying into the room in search of some papers, was privileged to behold—through his spectacles—a highly effective tableau. His wife, seated upon a music-stool, was holding a lace-bordered pocket-handkerchief to her eyes with her left hand, while her right was passively receiving the ardent kisses of an exceedingly handsome young man who knelt before her.

‘*Cré nom de nom!*’ ejaculated the astounded husband, forgetful of acquired good breeding, and falling back, in his surprise, upon the simple expletives of his youth.

Léon scrambled to his feet, looking very sheepish, and, truth to tell, wishing most devoutly in his heart that he had never come to the villa at all; and Madame de Trémonville burst into a peal of uncontrollable laughter. The situation was, perhaps, not so entirely novel a one to her as to cause her any special embarrassment.

The more she laughed, the blacker grew the countenances of the two men, both of whom might, indeed, be excused for failing to appreciate the joke.

‘When you have quite conquered your merriment, madame,’

said M. de Trémonville in a tone of suppressed fury, 'you will perhaps offer me some explanation of your conduct. As for Monsieur le Marquis——'

'I am ready to give you any satisfaction you may demand, monsieur,' said poor Léon, dolefully.

Madame de Trémonville's gaiety redoubled. 'A duel!' she cried, clapping her hands ecstatically. 'Charming! perfect! Ah, Baptiste! how many times have I not entreated you to take a few lessons in fencing, and to practise with a pistol, every now and then, in the garden? Something has always told me that you were destined to have an affair, and now you see that I was right.'

'Duelling is contrary to my principles,' replied M. de Trémonville, who had turned a trifle pale; 'also I decline to risk my life for the sake of one so worthless as you. Your perfidy, madame, is equalled only by your effrontery.'

'Hush! hush! my poor Baptiste. Those who have not the courage to fight should not use insulting language. Pick up your papers and go back to your study; you will never learn to be a man of the world. After your absurd behaviour you deserve no explanation: nevertheless you shall have one. When you came in, M. de Mersac—who leaves for France to-morrow morning—was only bidding me adieu in the style of the middle ages, a period of history which he especially admires, and which, I must admit, had the advantage of ours in point of courtesy. Let this be a lesson to you, Baptiste, not to judge by first appearances, and to refrain from vulgar expressions of astonishment at the sight of anything that you do not understand.'

'In that case,' answered M. de Trémonville, accepting this lame explanation with somewhat suspicious readiness, 'I can only offer my excuses to you and to monsieur. Monsieur le Marquis, permit me to express to you my unfeigned regret ——'

'Enough! enough!' interrupted Madame de Trémonville, unceremoniously. 'They are accepted—your excuses. You have spoilt a pretty little piece of acting; but we forgive you—and will detain you no longer.' And, as the door closed upon the mystified husband, she gave way to another outburst of mirth.

'What a ridiculous incident!' she exclaimed. 'It has killed romance for the remainder of the evening, that is certain. With the best will in the world I could not begin again where I left off. What shall we do now to amuse ourselves? Shall I sing to you, or shall we have a game of écarté? Or would

you like to take a walk round the garden? I am dying for a mouthful of fresh air.'

But Léon replied gravely that he must resist all these temptations. He had promised to return home within an hour, and had already considerably over-stayed his time. In truth, the scene in which he had just taken part had disconcerted him not a little. He was not sure that he had been any less ridiculous than M. de Trémonville, or even that he had been any less laughed at.

'Adieu, madame,' said he, in melancholy accents; and he contrived to infuse a tinge of reproach into his tone.

'Adieu, monsieur,' she replied carelessly, executing a flourish upon the piano.

She never raised her eyes from the keys until Léon had reached the door; then she jumped up, ran after him, and laid her hand upon his arm.

'Can you leave me like that?' she cried. 'Have you nothing more to say to me?'

'Nothing that you would care to hear, madame,' answered Léon, hesitatingly.

'Who knows? But you are right, perhaps, to keep silence if you desire to be remembered. You will always live in my memory now as the most discreet young man I have ever met. Let me only give you a little forecast of your fate—it will not take a minute—and then you shall go in peace.'

She took up a pack of cards which lay on the table as she spoke, and began rapidly dealing them out.

'A long journey—danger—honour and success,' she muttered. 'Ah? there is the king of spades, which spoils all. Ace of hearts, that is better—a crisis; but you will come out of it safely—two of diamonds—two of clubs——' The jewels on her plump white hands flashed as she deftly shifted the cards hither and thither; the lines about her mouth deepened; an anxious frown gathered upon her well-powdered brow. Madame de Trémonville had next to no conscience, and very little religion; but as a set-off, she had a rich store of mis-directed faith.

'Things might be worse for you,' she announced at length, quite seriously; 'but you will have troubles and dangers to pass through, and it is well to be prepared against every emergency. Take this, and wear it always round your neck; it is an Arab amulet, which a General who is dead now gave me years ago. They say it is a protection against mortal wounds.

For the rest, I will pray the blessed Virgin and your patron Saint to watch over you. Now go; I permit you to kiss my hand.'

The next minute she was back at the piano, and had resumed her ordinary light manner.

'Beau chevalier, qui partez pour la guerre,' she sang again—

Beau chevalier, qui partez pour la guerre,
Qu'allez vous faire
Si loin de nous ?
J'en vais pleurer, moi qui me laissais dire,
Que mon sourire
Était si doux.

The refrain hung in Léon's head long after he had ridden away in the starlight, and had recovered from the bewilderment into which he had been thrown by this fantastic farewell. It was the last he ever heard of Madame de Trémouville.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE LAST EVENING.

WHILE Léon was spending his valuable time in the edifying manner described in the last chapter, Jeanne was waiting for him on the verandah with such patience as she could command. Her long day's work was finished; her back was aching with stooping over trunks and folding up clothes; her eyes were tired and heavy; and to sit thus idly in the still night air would have been perhaps the most sensible thing she could have done, if inaction were, what it unfortunately is not, synonymous with rest.

So lovely and quiet a night might have brought her peace, had she been in a mood susceptible to external influences. All the world around her lay wrapped in a dreamy silence, enhanced, rather than broken, by the snoring croak of the frogs in the pool hard by; the wind had dropped to a fitful breeze, which, every now and again, wafted faint aromatic odours to her from the dewy shrubs; the luminous southern stars looked calmly down upon her from their immeasurable height—

As a little thing beholding
Man his long career unfolding.

But Jeanne had no ears just then for the soothing voices of Nature, nor could she derive any of the comfort which some people profess to feel from a philosophic contemplation of her own insignificance. On the contrary, her mind was so filled and harassed with thoughts of herself and of those dearest to her—with doubts, and fears, and anxieties—that she could hardly have said, without an effort, whether the night were starry or clouded.

How, indeed, could it have been otherwise with her, seeing that she had reached, and knew she had reached, the term of a period in her existence, the end of a long stage in her journey through the world, the last words of the first chapter of her life? Soon she must turn over the leaf; and who could tell what the next page might reveal? A dismal tale of anxiety and disappointment very likely, or, worse still, the brief, black-bordered record of a misfortune too terrible to be named as yet, even in thought. Jeanne shuddered, and turned resolutely away from the mental picture which rose before her. What is the use of tormenting oneself about troubles which do not exist? The present is bad enough; I will not think any more about the future,' she determined, very sensibly. Immediately after which she went back to her gloomy forecasts.

The mind is like a ship; it must be under way before it can be steered into this or that channel. Let it lie idle, and it will drift hither and thither, at the mercy of any chance current, and refuse to answer the helm. Jeanne, who was out of health, out of spirits, and very tired, had lost all self-control for the time; and what with the horrors conjured up by her imagination, what with the irritability which prolonged waiting for anybody or anything always engenders, had soon fretted herself into a condition of nervousness in which all conceivable calamities seemed probable, and good fortune a thing past hoping for.

When at last Léon arrived, he was startled and shocked by the glimpse of his sister's face which he caught as he stepped out on to the verandah; it looked so sad and wan and drawn.

'Why, Jeanne,' said he, laying his hand gently upon her shoulder, 'what is the matter? You have been over-fatiguing yourself.'

She turned her head, and looked up at him with pitiful eyes. She tried to speak, but the words would not come. Her

lips quivered, and presently two tears brimmed over from her eyelids and rolled slowly down her pale cheeks. Léon was down on his knees beside her chair, and had his arms round her in a minute.

‘What is it, Jeanne? What is it, *ma sœur*?’ he exclaimed. ‘Who has been troubling you?’

Perhaps his heart had already answered the question. He was rather selfish, as most young men are, but he had a conscience, which is likewise one of the attributes of youth; and it may very likely have smitten him, just then, with a remorseful memory of the long period during which he had avoided and neglected the sister who had sacrificed so much for him, and whom he was now about to part with, perhaps for ever.

‘Tell me all about it, Jeanne,’ he whispered, kissing her forehead. It was the first time for many months that he had spoken to her in that tone, and Jeanne was quite upset by it. She threw her arms round her brother’s neck, hid her face on his shoulder, and sobbed like any child.

‘Love me a little, Léon,’ she murmured; ‘you are all I have in the world.’

‘Jeanne, Jeanne! you know I love you! Something has come between us lately; it has been all my fault, I know. It has been ever since that accursed night when I lost the money. I fancied you despised me—you would have been quite right if you had, Heaven knows! And then Saint-Luc——’

‘No,’ interrupted Jeanne, hastily; ‘if anybody has been to blame, it is I. I have been unhappy and anxious, and that has often made my manner disagreeable, though indeed I have never wished it to be so. Let us forget what has passed. We are good friends now, are we not? and we will never be anything else again. I am sorry I should have treated you to a scene on your last night, dear,’ she added, straightening herself in her chair, and drying her eyes. ‘I think it must be the heat that makes me so silly, and takes away all my courage and strength. Now sit down in that arm-chair that is waiting for you, and tell me the news from the farm. Have you sold all the colts, and is Pierre as dissatisfied as usual with the price you have got for them? What bargains he will drive for us, and what a bad name we shall get in the country while we are away!’

Jeanne was always a little shy after having displayed emotion, even before her brother; and Léon, who understood her, accepted the change of subject.

'I have disposed of nearly everything that has four legs to stand upon,' he answered cheerfully, 'and I have told Pierre he must get rid of the cripples upon the best terms he can obtain. I don't choose to leave my farm ready stocked for the Arabs to plunder.'

'Do you think there will be an insurrection, then?'

'I hope there will not; but one never can tell. What is certain is that, if the Arabs do rise now, or a short time hence, they will overrun the whole province, for we have no troops to send against them. I mean to have everything valuable sent away even from this house as soon as you are gone, though I hardly think they will get as near the town as this.'

'What are you going to do with the ponies, Léon? I wish you would sell them.'

'The ponies I bought from Saint-Luc, do you mean? I was thinking of sending them to stables in Algiers.'

'Don't do that; what is the use of going to such an expense? I should be so glad if you would get rid of them.'

'Well, you see, it is not a very good time for selling ponies,' said Léon, stroking his chin thoughtfully. 'The Government is buying up every sort and kind of horse, sound and unsound, but they have a certain standard of size unfortunately, and nobody else has any money to spend. And then there is that scrape on the shoulder that Caïd got the day you let him down.'

'I did not let him down,' interrupted Jeanne, indignantly. 'I never let a horse down in my life.'

'Well, the day he *came* down. It has not done him an atom of harm; still purchasers will look at these things. Why do you want to sell the ponies?'

'Oh, it does not much matter. But you know I never liked driving them.'

'Jeanne,' said Léon, suddenly, 'if I ask you a question, will you answer me truly?'

'Yes.'

'Then do you particularly dislike Saint-Luc?'

'No,' answered Jeanne, raising her grave eyes to her brother's for a moment and then dropping them again. 'I do not particularly dislike him.'

'Because, if you did——'

'If I did?'

'I mean, if there were really any danger of your being unhappy as his wife—only I am certain that he would make any

woman happy. And now that he has distinguished himself so much, his wife will have every reason to be proud of him. I told you, did I not, that he has been thanked by the Government for his services ?’

‘Did you ? I do not remember. I have never supposed him to be anything but a brave man.’

‘I can’t quite make you out, Jeanne. You always speak of him with a sort of aversion, and he himself has noticed it. He is for ever harping upon the subject in his letters, and I don’t know how to answer him, except by saying, what I believe is the truth, that it is not him whom you hate, but men in general.’

‘Not all men,’ said Jeanne, smiling.

‘No ; I know there is one unworthy exception ; and I dare say you are fond of M. de Fontvieille, and the Curé, and one or two other relics of antiquity ; but when it comes to *young* men—ah, that is another affair ! I declare that I cannot call to mind a single one whom you have not positively detested, except Mr. Barrington ; and I believe you only made friends with him because he was an Englishman. You are not like other girls, you dear old Jeanne ; you will never be in love with anybody’

‘I do not love M. de Saint-Luc, and he knows it,’ said Jeanne. ‘He has no right to complain of me.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Léon, musingly. ‘It seems a little strange that you should never have written him a line, nor even sent him a message, after all he has been through. Not that he does complain, only I fancy he is rather hurt about it.’

‘If I had known that he expected me to write, I would have written,’ answered Jeanne, indifferently. ‘I can easily send him a line or two, from time to time, in future, though I hardly know what I am to say to him. Now we will waste no more of our last evening in discussing the subject.’

‘But, Jeanne,’ persisted Léon, ‘I want to know one thing—do you really, of your own free-will, wish to marry Saint-Luc ?’

‘I don’t know exactly what you mean by my own free-will ; nobody forces me into marrying him. You know how the engagement came about ; everybody wished it, and it seemed desirable in more ways than one.’

‘Yes,’ acquiesced Léon, with a sigh ; ‘it seemed desirable, but there have been changes since then. Do you know, Jeanne, I am afraid you would never have consented to the arrangement if I had not lost that money.’

Jeanne remained silent.

‘What a selfish wretch I have been!’ exclaimed the young man, with a genuine access of penitence. ‘Happily the mistake is not irreparable. Now that our poor Duchess has been taken from us, there is no longer any need for our keeping this house, and before I leave, I will write instructions to have the whole of my property in Algeria sold. The moment is not very propitious; but no matter! I shall always realise enough to pay Saint-Luc, and keep a sufficient amount of capital to live upon; and perhaps, when the war is over, we may come back to Africa and make a fresh start. In any case my good, kind Jeanne, you are free; and the interest of your own fortune will more than meet your expenses, wherever you may be. I will explain everything to Saint-Luc when I see him.’

Jeanne rose slowly from her chair, and, bending over her brother, kissed him on the forehead. Then she took both his hands, and, drawing back a little, surveyed him, with a proud, happy light shining through her moist eyes, while he, on his side, smiled back at her, rejoicing in his heart that he was able once more to look his sister in the face without an effort.’

‘Do you forgive me?’ he asked at length.

‘Forgive you! It is I who ought to ask for forgiveness. I have been wronging you all this time, Léon. I have thought—but it does not matter what I have thought; I know now that you are still my own generous, foolish Léon, and that you are ready to ruin yourself rather than let me run any risk of unhappiness. If our dear father were alive, he would not be ashamed of his son.’

There is every reason to suppose that these flattering words found a ready echo in the breast of the person to whom they were addressed. Léon was always prone to estimate himself at the value set upon him by others, and although he had just accused himself of selfishness, he had only used the term in a retrospective sense.

‘Nonsense, *ma sœur*,’ he answered lightly; ‘I simply do my duty.’ But he probably remembered, at the same time, that this is more than most people can say with truth.

Jeanne went on, without noticing his interpolation—‘You must not think, though, that I am less a De Mersac than you. What I have to do is quite plain to me, and I intend to do it. And therefore, my dear Léon, you will do me the pleasure to keep the land that belongs to you, and to take no message from me to M. de Saint-Luc, except that, after this, I shall write to him once a month.’

‘I tell you, Jeanne, my mind is made up; and when I say that my mind is made up ——’

‘You very often proceed to change it. Do not look angry; obstinacy is a vice, not a virtue, and you need not dispute me my possession of it. If you will think a little, you will see how inconvenient and absurd it would be to alter our plans now; and indeed, as you say, it is so very unlikely that I shall ever fall in love with anybody, that I might as well marry M. de Saint-Luc as another. If you and I could always live alone together, it might be different; but that is out of the question. Some day you yourself will marry, and then what is to become of me?’

‘Do you suppose that I will ever let you have any other home than mine? I promise you that my wife, whoever she may prove to be, will be made to understand, from the first, that her entrance into the family is to make no difference in your position. But the fact is that I shall certainly not marry for a great many years, and perhaps never. The women of our time,’ continued Léon, with the solemnity of a man of varied experiences, ‘are not to my taste. They are artificial, hypocritical, worldly, and heartless (you will understand that I do not speak of you—you are exceptional), and honest men are no match for them. They conceal their private lives by means of a pretence of religious fervour just as they cover their faces with white and red paint; and who is to tell what is beneath either? I, unfortunately, am very easily deceived; and for that reason I am resolved never to marry a pretty or fashionable lady. No; my wife, if ever I have one, will be a plain, sensible person, not very young, who will accept her position quietly, and not disturb you in the least. But upon the whole, I think I would rather live and die a bachelor. After all, there is barely one woman in a hundred whom one can trust.’

Without inquiring into the cause of this sweeping condemnation of her sex, Jeanne expressed a conviction that time would modify it.

‘In the course of a few years you will undoubtedly meet the one woman out of a hundred,’ she said; ‘and though I know you would always make me welcome, still I should not like to be third in the household, and upon your wedding-day I should find myself obliged to choose between two alternatives—marriage and the convent. Probably I am better fitted for the former, and therefore I ought to be very glad that I have the chance of taking M. de Saint-Luc, who has proved that he

is really fond of me, and whom I do not dislike—indeed, I sometimes almost like him.’

‘It is no use, Jeanne,’ answered Léon. ‘You say all this because you wish me to keep my money; but I have made up my mind that, having lost, I will pay; and you need not give yourself the trouble to argue the point any more, for I warn you beforehand that you will fail.’

It will scarcely, however, surprise the reader to learn that, after another half hour of discussion, he had so far yielded as to promise that he would neither issue immediate instructions for the sale of his property, nor take any steps towards breaking off his sister’s engagement. Jeanne, on her side, agreed to leave the question of her marriage open for the present. There was a kind of tacit understanding between the two young people that nothing definite was to be settled until after the conclusion of peace. Very likely both of them felt, though neither may have actually faced the thought, that it was needless to form plans which powder and shot might dispose of at any moment.

So they settled it between them in the starlight, and were contented with themselves and with one another. It may have been observed that, in the unselfish contest, the interests and wishes of M. de Saint-Luc had not received much attention; but he, like the poet in Schiller’s song, had been guilty of the unpardonable fault of absence at the critical moment, and could not, therefore, expect to be remembered. To be sure, the poet’s consolation of substituting heavenly for earthly joys remained open to him.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FAREWELL TO ALGIERS.

THE idlers of Algiers—Christian, Mussulman, and Hebrew—were collected together upon the wharves, watching, with languid curiosity, a sight which for them had no longer the charm of novelty—that of a huge, slab-sided transport slowly moving through the harbour’s mouth. While a faint farewell cheer rose from the decks of the outward-bound ship, and was answered by a still fainter echo from those on shore, the port-admiral’s eight-oared boat was brought alongside of the quay, and out of it stepped the admiral himself, in full fig. He had been bidding adieu to some friends who were leaving for France, and

had brought back with him a young lady whom a similar errand had taken on board the transport. The bystanders were much impressed by the majestic beauty of this pale lady, who stepped lightly on shore with the admiral's assistance, bowed gracefully to the gentlemen in attendance, and, entering the carriage which was waiting for her, was presently whirled away in a thick cloud of dust.

'A brave girl,' remarked the admiral to one of his subordinates, taking off his cocked hat, and rubbing his head as he looked after her. 'I wish there were more like her. Not but what, at such a time, a little more display of feeling would not have been amiss; but war makes the best of us hard-hearted. Come home to breakfast with me, and we will drink her health, and a safe return to the young Marquis.'

'Did you remark that tall young woman who has just driven away?' asked one of the loafers of his neighbour. 'That is the sister of one De Mersac, a so-called marquis, who has engaged himself as a volunteer, and is going to get himself massacred over yonder. They tell me she encouraged him to leave, though he is her only brother, and she has no other relations.'

'The citoyenne has deserved well of the country,' responded loafer number two, lifting his broad-leaved felt hat with a pompous gesture.

'Pooh! she belongs to a breed which deserves nothing of the country but the guillotine. For my part, I should have respected her more as a woman if she could have spared a few tears for her brother, who will not lead a life of amusement, I promise you, while she is driving about in her well-cushioned carriage. But that is how they are made, these aristocrats—*ça n'a pas de cœur*.

These frank criticisms would hardly have disturbed Jeanne's composure if she could have overheard them. To be accused of insensibility was no new experience to her, nor was it her habit to trouble herself much about the judgment of outsiders, if only Léon did not misunderstand her. In truth, emotion with her seldom took the form of weeping; and though we have already more than once seen her affected in this way, it will have been observed that such exhibitions took place only in the strictest privacy, and were indeed attributable in part to shaken health, and in part, also, to the fact that, after all, she had lachrymal glands, like the rest of the world.

Now, while her little horses trotted up the slopes of Mus-

tapha, she looked out upon the well-known landscape with dry eyes, though her head was beginning to feel heavy, and there was a dull, gnawing pain at her heart. After a time she turned, and entered into conversation with the groom who sat behind her, asking him a great many questions about his horses, and giving him such minute instructions as to their treatment that he, too, albeit a faithful servant and profound admirer of his mistress, ended by joining in the general verdict, and wondered within himself how she could have the heart to occupy herself with such small details so soon. But, in truth, she was talking mechanically, and sometimes almost at random, being anxious chiefly to escape from her own thoughts, and being secretly a little frightened at the prospect of re-entering her silent, lonely home.

It was well for her that, when she reached it, M. de Fontvieille met her upon the threshold, holding his hat in one hand and an open letter in the other.

‘Mademoiselle,’ said he, after, with his antiquated courtesy, he had assisted her to alight, and had offered her a trembling old arm to lead her into the house, ‘how long does a young lady require to pack up her clothes for a journey?’

‘That depends. A week, perhaps, if it were necessary to get things done in a hurry; but I would rather have a fortnight, there are so many little matters to be seen to. You have heard from England again?’

‘*Tiens, tiens, tiens!* a fortnight! And I who have telegraphed to this poor M. Ashley to say that you will join him at Marseilles in four days’ time!’

‘Impossible! I could never be ready. Are you so anxious, then, to get rid of me, monsieur?’

‘Heaven forbid! But it seems that your uncle has already set out to meet you, and I imagined that it would not amuse him to wait very long at Marseilles—especially as they are in a state of revolution, or something very like it, there. However, I will telegraph again to say that you will require a week to make your preparations. I do not think we could reasonably ask for a longer delay than that.’

‘No, do not telegraph,’ said Jeanne, with a short sigh. ‘Fanchette can put up all that I need in twenty-four hours. What does it signify, when all is said and done?’

‘Why, little enough, indeed,’ answered M. de Fontvieille, brightening up. ‘I have always been an advocate for getting necessary partings over as quickly as possible. What must be

must; and it is less painful to look back upon sorrow than to look forward to it. Yesterday, if you will believe me, I was so much upset by the idea of having to bid adieu to our dear Léon, that I was compelled more than once to have recourse to a calming medicine. To-day, on the contrary, I am, so to speak, at ease, and have already begun to anticipate the happy day when we shall all be reunited. It is thus that we are constituted, we weak mortals.'

'What does it signify?' repeated Jeanne, dreamily, thinking to herself that nothing signified much now.

After all, the time allowed her proved sufficient for all needful purposes, though short enough to keep her incessantly occupied both in body and mind, and she was dimly conscious that it was best so. Sitting on the deck of a mail-steamer, on the third day, and looking back at the rapidly receding shore, with its dazzling white buildings, its green woods and background of snow-capped heights, she could scarcely bring herself to believe in the reality of the swift current of events which had swept her life clean out of its old channel, and was bearing it away towards a vague future, and half expected to wake presently with a start, and find herself in her bedroom at El Biar. So, at least, she said to herself, and would gladly have kept up the fond illusion, had not the outward and visible signs of actuality been too plain to be ignored.

For the great steamer was trembling in every plank with the throbbing of her shaft; the crew, a hybrid gang, such as man all Mediterranean vessels, were shouting to one another in an unintelligible jargon; the passengers were pacing the decks with that energy which a landsman always displays as soon as he gets afloat in calm weather; the air was full of the fresh, salt smell of the sea; and here was Monsieur le Capitaine, a spick-and-span gentleman in naval uniform, come to ask, with his best bow, whether mademoiselle had all that she required. Last, not least, M. de Fontvieille, arrayed in a wonderful travelling costume, which had not seen the light for some ten years, was leaning over the bulwarks, and scanning the coast through an ancient pair of field-glasses.

The old gentleman had insisted upon accompanying Jeanne as far as Marseilles, despite her assurances that she was perfectly well able to take care of herself, declaring that poor dear Madame de Breuil would never have sanctioned such a proceeding as a young lady's undertaking a voyage alone, and that, for himself, the change would do him good. So he had

uncarthed the garments afore-mentioned, had packed up his necessities in a handsome carpet-bag, worked for him many years before by the late Madame de Fontvieille, and bearing the inscription '*Bon voyage*,' in yellow letters upon a blue worsted ground, and was now enjoying himself immensely in the society of a few fellow-passengers with whom he had already fraternised.

'Depend upon it, monsieur,' Jeanne heard him saying, 'there is nothing like travel to open a man's mind and develop his self-reliance. I, who am an old campaigner, so to speak, can make myself at home where you please in five minutes. To be sure, such a voyage as we are now embarked upon is but a bagatelle in these days—a mere promenade of eight-and-forty hours, nothing more; but when I was young, it was another affair! Then a man made his will, and took leave of his friends before he stepped on board ship. I myself—I who speak to you—have been tossed about for a whole week in the Gulf of Lyons, and driven back into port at the end of it. And glad to get there too, *parbleu*! Now we have changed all that. With our magnificent vessels and our steam-power we have converted the sea from a rough master into an obedient servant, whom I smile at, but salute for old acquaintance' sake.'

However, his obedient servant, supplemented by a brisk nor'-wester, got the upper hand of him before nightfall, and drove him discomfited into his cabin, where he remained until the bare hills of Provence were well in sight. Jeanne, who had escaped sea-sickness, forbore to remark upon his woebegone aspect when he staggered up to the bench where she was seated, and magnanimously allowed him to condole with her upon miseries which she had not endured.

'We have had a shocking passage,' said he. 'You must have suffered horribly, my poor child; but never mind! it is nearly over now. Heaven be praised! we shall soon be in a comfortable hotel, and then you will only have railway journeys to look forward to. They may say what they like, but the sea is a vile thing—there is no pleasure to be got out of it at all. I, alas! must face it again in a few days' time, but there! we will not think of that. To-night we will dine well—*cras ingens iterabimus æquor*, as Horace says.'

And having delivered himself of this recondite quotation with the assured air of a man who has his classics at his fingers' ends, M. de Fontvieille pulled a small looking-glass out of his pocket, and began to examine his features in it anxiously.

‘Do I look pale?’ he asked. ‘Have I the appearance of a bad sailor? I hope not; for I am desirous of making a favourable impression upon your uncle; and I know what these English are; they have a contempt for everybody who is not amphibious. It would be a mark of good taste on the part of Mr. Ashley if he were to abstain from coming to meet us when we land; but we must not expect too much of an Englishman.’

In the sequel, however, Mr. Ashley vindicated the national character for delicacy—at least, he did not come out in a boat to receive his niece, nor was he to be discovered in the custom-house, where the travellers were detained for a considerable time before their luggage was delivered to them. But when, in due course of time, they drew up before the door of the *Hôtel du Louvre*, and M. de Fontvieille inquired whether an English gentleman of the name of Achelay were staying there, a tall, stout, white-whiskered personage advanced through the *portecochère*, remarking, ‘Oh! Mossos Ashley, *c’est moi*. How are you? Glad to see you.’

M. de Fontvieille skipped nimbly out of the *fiacre*, swept the pavement with his hat, and poured forth a glib oration expressive of his pleasure at meeting Mr. Ashley, and his gratitude to that gentleman for having undertaken so long a journey on Jeanne’s behalf.

‘*Pas de tout*, I’m sure,’ replied the person addressed ‘Delighted to have been of any use—delighted.’

He did not seem specially delighted. He was a dull, heavy-looking man, whose expression, so far as he can be said to have had any expression, appeared to imply that he would be very much obliged if the new-comers would kindly get their polite speeches over as soon as they could, and go away. ‘How do, Jane?’ he continued, holding out a big, fat hand to his niece. ‘Long time since we’ve met, isn’t it?’

‘I don’t think we have ever met before,’ answered Jeanne with her grave smile.

The porter, the head-waiter, the landlord, and a little crowd of underlings were all gazing at the strange lady with that admiring homage which no Frenchman ever fails to render to beauty; but Mr. Ashley’s half-closed eyes perceived only that the young woman was remarkably tall.

‘Ah, well, no; I suppose not. No, to be sure,’ he answered. ‘I knew your mother though,’ he added, after a momentary pause, as though that were pretty much the same thing.

Nobody knowing exactly what to say next, a rather awkward silence ensued, which was broken at length by a yawn from Turco, who had been lying concealed in the *fiacre*, and now judged it time to make his entry in a leisurely, dignified fashion. Mr. Ashley brightened perceptibly at the sight of him.

'What a magnificent dog!' he exclaimed. 'Is that yours?'

'Yes,' answered Jeanne. 'I had not time to write and ask whether you would allow me to bring him to England; but I thought I would let him come as far as this upon the chance. If he would be a trouble to you, I can easily send him back with M. de Fontvieille.'

'Trouble? Lord bless your soul, no!' responded Mr. Ashley, with more cordiality than he had hitherto displayed. 'No dog ever was a trouble to me. I've got lots of 'em at home. Well, Jowler!'

This last familiar apostrophe was directed at Turco, who now raised his solemn eyes, instituted investigations of an olfactory nature, and apparently finding them satisfactory, thrust his huge muzzle into the speaker's hand. Dogs are more cosmopolitan in their sympathies than humans.

After another prolonged pause, Mr. Ashley, who had been frowning at his boots and whistling an inaudible tune, looked up, as with a sudden happy inspiration, remarking, 'I daresay you'd like to go upstairs now, and change your things—and that,' and seemed very much relieved when Jeanne answered, 'If you please.' He was a dull, methodical man, who meant well towards his neighbours in a general way, but disliked strangers, by reason of the mental suffering which he had to undergo in order to find something suitable to say to them. Later in the day, M. de Fontvieille, speaking under the mellow influence of a good dinner and a bottle of Heidsieck monopole, described him as a *brave campagnard*. Jeanne, more prudent, but less lenient, committed herself to no articulate judgment upon her uncle, but mentally set him down as a *bourgeois*.

Nevertheless, she did what she could to be gracious to him, exerting herself to set him at his ease, and thanking him very prettily for having travelled so far to meet her. To which he replied, 'Oh, it doesn't matter,' with an evident sense of hard usage strong upon him. 'I shouldn't have minded the trip a bit, if it hadn't been for the pheasants,' he was so good as to explain; 'but your aunt thought it wouldn't have done for you to travel all by yourself—and no more it would, of course. And I daresay we shall manage to get home before the week is

out—that is, if you can stand a few longish days in the train.’

Jeanne answered that she was quite prepared to perform the whole distance without a break, if necessary, whereat her uncle’s features assumed an expression of cheerfulness and approval.

‘Oh, I shouldn’t think for a moment of asking you to do that,’ said he; ‘only some ladies, you know, want to stop for the night at every ten miles, and then grumble because the journey takes such a long time, you know.’

Jeanne signified that she was not one of these unreasonable persons; and Mr. Ashley immediately produced a *Bradshaw*, and began to sigh and rub his forehead over its intricacies.

Poor M. de Fontvieille, who had perforce to pass three days in Marseilles, and had counted upon whiling them away with such amusements as the sad circumstances of the time allowed of, was rather dismayed when he heard that he was to be left in solitude the next morning. However, he put a good face upon it, and maintained a cheerful demeanour up to the last moment. Not until Jeanne had already taken her place in the railway-carriage, and Mr. Ashley was preparing to follow her, did the old gentleman permit his natural feelings to obtain a temporary mastery over him. Then, with two tears trickling down his withered cheeks, he approached the burly Englishman, and standing upon tiptoe in order to grasp him impressively by both elbows, delivered himself of a brief exordium which he had prepared beforehand.

‘Monsieur, I confide to your care one who is more dear to me than my life. I do not ask you to treat her with kindness—that would be to insult you, who have so generously offered her an asylum when those of her own family have held aloof. I surrender her to you without fear, but not without a pang; for I am an old man, monsieur, and my time must be near at hand. That is why I will venture to beg of you, although we are of different faiths, to join your prayers to mine that I may not be long separated from those whom I love.’

‘Certainly—certainly; I will, I’m sure, with pleasure—and Mrs. Ashley too; and we’ll take the greatest care of Jane. Don’t be agitated—pray don’t!’ pleaded Mr. Ashley, in an agony of terror lest this demonstrative Frenchman should proceed to embrace him *coram populo*. ‘I think, if you’ll excuse me a minute, I’ll just run and buy a paper,’ he added, almost shaking off his interlocutor; and with that, fairly took to his heels.

M. de Fontvieille was quite satisfied. He had not understood a word of the Englishman's hurried speech, but he had detected in it, as he thought, signs of sympathetic emotion. '*C'est un bon cœur,*' he murmured, as he hoisted himself up upon the carriage step to say his last words to Jeanne.

'Dear mademoiselle—my dear child—I had a hundred things to speak of to you, but I do not feel that I have the strength; and, after all, you have no need of advice from me. You know better than I what is right, and you never fail to do it. Do not forget your old friend, who loves you. Here is a small souvenir—it is only a sapphire ring—of no great value—you know I am a miser as regards my jewels; but they will all come to you soon. Write to me when you can find the time; I shall be very lonely without you, and our poor Léon. Adieu, mademoiselle—adieu, my dear Jeanne!'

And then Mr. Ashley came running back with his newspaper, and was pushed into his place by the guard. The door was slammed, the train began to move, and the course of Jeanne's life took a fresh departure. Her last glimpse of old associations showed her M. de Fontvieille dissolved in tears upon the platform, waving a straw hat with one hand and a pocket-handkerchief with the other, while the railway officials, the gendarmes, and the porters grouped around him looked on with a respectful interest.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HOLMHURST.

MR. ASHLEY, peering cautiously from behind the shelter of his newspaper, after half-an-hour or so of travelling, was relieved to see that his opposite neighbour, so far from being in floods of tears, as he had expected her to be, was sitting upright in her place and gazing calmly, if somewhat abstractedly, at the flying landscape. This discovery, together with a vague consciousness that the occasion called for some observation of a sympathetic nature, emboldened him to remark:

'These partings are very distressing.'

'Yes,' said Jeanne.

'But they are what everybody has to go through, sooner or later, and one mustn't give way. I am glad to see that you

don't give way. And if there were no partings, don't you know,' continued Mr. Ashley, struggling manfully to say something original, 'if there weren't any partings, there would be no meetings.'

This evidently struck him as being well put, for, after a pause, he repeated: 'If there were no partings there would be no meetings; we must remember that.'

Jeanne bent her head slightly, and gave him a little, faint smile. She had already recognised in her uncle a worthy, but inferior species of being, with whom it was wholly unnecessary to converse, and whose nature fitted him rather to obey than to command.

Her own nature, as we are aware, was of the opposite kind; and so Mr. Ashley, who had the ready instinct of a dull man, soon discovered. Before the day was at an end, he and his niece had found their respective levels with regard to one another, and were quite comfortable together. He was greatly impressed by Jeanne's quiet repose of manner, by the calmness with which she utterly declined to be hurried or flustered when the time came for them to change carriages, and by the matter-of-course way in which she ordered one of the railway officials to fetch some water for Turco, before she would consent to continue her journey. At the frontier, where, during those troublous times, it was customary to make a prodigious fuss over passports, and where he was thrown into a fever of mingled indignation and alarm by a frowning individual who required him to prove his identity, he finally surrendered all semblance of authority into the hands of his charge, who made things smooth without any difficulty at all.

'I can't make head or tail of these foreigners—never could,' he remarked apologetically, as he sank back, with a sigh of exhaustion, upon the cushions of the railway carriage. 'You'd better do the talking, Jane; you know how to manage 'em.'

So from that time forth the command of the expedition was taken up by Mademoiselle de Mersac, *vice* Mr. Ashley, superseded. That same evening the travellers reached Geneva, and the next day journeyed on to Bâle, and the next to Cologne, and so northwards. Mr. Ashley, relieved of the responsibility of searching time-tables, making calculations in foreign coin, and speaking tongues only partially known to him, was in high good humour, and declared several times that he had never enjoyed a trip more in his life. He conceived a high estimate of his niece's character and abilities; the only thing that vexed

him about her being the unfortunate accident of her nationality, which was fatal to a free interchange of ideas upon the absorbing events of the day. The papers at that time were full of the proclamations and manifestoes of the young dictator of Tours, for whose windy utterances Mr. Ashley nourished a truly noble and British contempt, which, of course, he was obliged under the circumstances to suppress as best he could. From time to time, to be sure, being charged as it were to bursting point with bottled-up wrath, he was fain to break out into the commencement of a diatribe against 'that fellow Gombetter;' but it must be recorded to his credit that he never failed to cut short his sentence with a profuse apology, and an explanation that his disparaging remarks had no reference to the French people.

'Plucky fellows, and good soldiers when they are well led,' he was kind enough to say. 'Our old allies in the Crimea, too; we haven't forgotten that in England, I assure you.' After which he would generally fall foul of King William's pious telegrams, that being a subject upon which he felt himself at liberty to use as strong language as he pleased.

As far as Jeanne was concerned, he might have spoken for or against her country without scruple. Her own private anxieties and sorrows were too much in her mind just then to permit of her taking any great interest in public affairs; still less could she have brought herself to care what the opinion of this or that individual Englishman might be upon them. Her one desire was to reach England, where she hoped she would find a letter from Léon awaiting her arrival. The journey was not an enjoyable one to her, whatever it may have been to her companion, and she was glad to get to the end of it.

Landing on Dover pier, on a murky November afternoon, after a long passage through thick weather from Ostend, Jeanne took her first survey of her mother's native land, and did not find it specially attractive to the eye. But she had not much time to spend in forming impressions, for Mr. Ashley, who had rushed off to the book-stall as soon as he had set foot on land, came hurrying back, loaded with newspapers, and brimming over with the latest intelligence.

'Here's a pretty kettle of fish!' he cried, as he scrambled into his place. 'Russia's been tearing up the Treaty of Paris! I always knew how it would be. And, oh! here's a bit of good news for you, Jane. Your people have licked the Bavarians somewhere. Like to see the *Telegraph*? They've got a long account of it all.'

The winter evening closed in. Dover, Ashford, Tunbridge, were soon left behind. Mr. Ashley denounced Prince Gortschakoff, and declared his conviction that the Gladstone ministry was trifling with the honour of the country. Jeanne was still deep in the details of the battle of Coulmiers—an undoubted victory for the French arms at last—when the train came to a standstill at Sevenoaks, and her uncle, throwing open the door, exclaimed :

‘By Jove! here we are already! Jump out, Jane; this is our station.’

Jeanne obeyed this invitation by stepping down in her leisurely, deliberate way on to the platform. A servant relieved her of her shawls and umbrellas; and in a few minutes she found herself seated by her uncle’s side in a mail phaeton, being whirled along the muddy lanes at the full speed of a pair of gigantic horses.

‘Bless us and save us, how these brutes do pull!’ gasped Mr. Ashley. ‘It’s enough to drag a man’s arms out of their sockets. How were they going as you came along, Simpson?’

‘Ran away the ’ole distance, sir,’ answered the man from behind. ‘Couldn’t have stopped ’em in the first two miles, not if it had ha’ been ever so! Took ’em to Caterham and back, with the ladies, yesterday, too, sir. I never see such ’osses for work!’

‘Ah!’ grunted Mr. Ashley, evidently not ill-pleased. ‘They won’t run away with *me*, I can tell them.’

They managed to keep him pretty well occupied though, and left him little breath, save for such interjectional remarks as: ‘Your Algerian horses don’t run quite to this size, eh, Jane?’ or ‘Precious dark night, ain’t it?’ or, ‘That’s Westersham,’ or, ‘That’s Brasted,’ as the twinkling lights of some town or hamlet showed through the gloom.

A short three-quarters of an hour brought them to a park-gate, which somebody, running out from the lodge hard by, flung open to admit them. Presently came another gate, a gravel sweep, flanked by evergreens, and then Jeanne made out, as well as the darkness would allow her, a low, irregularly-built, white house.

‘Welcome to Holmhurst!’ cried Mr. Ashley, who had assumed a certain bluff, British heartiness of manner since he had been once more upon his native soil. ‘Here, catch hold of the reins, Simpson. Why the dickens don’t somebody come to open the door? Oh! here’s Mrs. Ashley.’

The front door had been thrown open, letting out a stream

of ruddy light into the clinging mist outside, and through it hurried a tall, grey-haired lady, who was talking volubly to nobody in particular as she walked, and who clutched hastily at her cap, which had somehow fallen on to the extreme back of her head. Just as she reached the threshold she dropped her shawl, which she kicked impatiently away into an adjacent puddle, whence it was rescued by Simpson, who shook it and delivered it up to an imperturbable butler.

'Well, John,' began this impetuous lady, bestowing a hasty embrace upon her husband, and speaking in a hurried monotone, as though it were absolutely essential that she should crowd as many words into one sentence as most people do into five: 'so here you are back again, safe and sound. No return of gout?—no cold? That's right. And this is Jeanne. How do you do, my dear?—so delighted to see you—not that I do see you. Come in and get warm; you must be frozen. Did you have a rough passage? Have you had any tea? Will you have anything now, or wait till dinner? We dine in half an hour—that is, we ought, only this new cook is so dreadfully unpunctual. Have you much trouble with your servants in Algiers? Here they are beyond everything—no satisfying them, and no getting them to do their work! Not you, Jarvis' (this to the butler), 'you know I don't mean you. Come into the library, my dear, and be introduced to your cousins. Je devrais parler français, mais ça m'est devenu tant difficile—faute d'habitude. Vous m'excuserez—je veux dire, tu m'excuseras——'

Jeanne stemmed this torrent of words by remarking:

'I am quite accustomed to speak English, madame.'

'Yes, to be sure—of course—you speak it much better than I do French, I have no doubt. What *has* become of my shawl?—never mind! This is Helen, and this is Blanche.'

Mrs. Ashley, while continuing her remarks, had led the way into a large, comfortable-looking room, lined with book-cases, and furnished with an abundance of chintz-covered sofas and armchairs. Two fair-haired, blue-eyed girls rose to greet the new-comer. Jeanne, who had all a Frenchwoman's admiration for pink and white colouring, thought them excessively pretty, and noted, with a certain sense of relief, that they lacked their mother's conversational powers; for when one of them had observed, 'You must be dreadfully cold!' and the other had added, 'How tired you must be!' they seemed to think that they had said all that the occasion required, and relapsed into a smiling silence.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Ashley, who had not allowed her tongue to rest from the trifling consideration that nobody was listening to her, was concluding a long sentence by a name, the sound of which brought a sudden flash into Jeanne's pale cheeks.

'Miss Barrington—Jeanne, let me introduce you to Miss Barrington, who is anxious to make your acquaintance.'

Miss Barrington had been a beauty once upon a time. She was now a somewhat remarkable-looking old woman. Her abundant white hair, her sharp black eyes, her overhanging eyebrows, and her shrewd, thin face, made up a whole which formed a striking contrast to the Ashley family, whose comely countenances could not boast of one clearly-drawn feature amongst them.

'How do you do?' said she, holding out her hand, and laying down the tating upon which she had been engaged. 'I have heard all about you from my nephew. There is a letter for you somewhere. I thought I would just mention the fact, because Mrs. Ashley has, of course, forgotten all about it, and she is just as likely as not to throw it into the fire, if you don't claim it.'

'Oh, no!' protested Mrs. Ashley, 'I should never have done that—I shouldn't, indeed. I know my memory is treacherous, but I am always very particular about letters, and really I can't remember to have burnt an unopened one more than once in my life, and that turned out to be only an invitation to dinner, so that it really did not signify much, though the people did make a ridiculous fuss about it. Jeanne's letter is on her dressing-table, where I put it with my own hands. Will you come upstairs now, my dear, and see your room?'

Jeanne followed her aunt, willingly enough, upstairs to the prettily-furnished bedroom which had been prepared for her. A bright fire was burning cheerfully in the grate, and a maid was busy unpacking her clothes. On the pincushion, transfixed by a huge, black-headed pin, was the wished-for letter, with its familiar French stamps and its many postmarks.

'There!' cried Mrs. Ashley, pointing triumphantly to this evidence of her care, 'I pinned it down myself, so that there should be no risk of its being swept away. I know you will be anxious to read it, for I can guess from whom it comes,' she added meaningly, patting Jeanne on the shoulder, and turning round to nod and smile before she bustled out of the room.

So Jeanne, left to herself at last, sank into an armchair before the pleasant warmth and blaze of the coal fire (the first she had ever seen, by the way), and settled herself to enjoy her

letter, which was not from M. de Saint-Luc at all, as worthy Mrs. Ashley had assumed it to be, but from Léon.

The lad wrote in high spirits. He had joined his regiment, and had received a lieutenant's commission forthwith. He might have had his troop but for native modesty; for in those days commissions fluttered about in the air, right and left, and were often caught by less competent hands than his. He was full of enthusiasm for the army, for his comrades; above all, for his old friend and Colonel. An action was said to be imminent, and he was about to be sent to the front—Coulmiers and victory before him, if he had known it. That—or another fate—thought his sister, with a long sigh, as she dropped the letter. 'You are not to be anxious if you get no news of me for some time,' Léon had added in a postscript. Just so we can all remember, when we had the toothache in our childish days, being recommended 'not to think about it.'

Jeanne thought about it till she found that she had barely left herself time to perform her evening toilette; and then, changing her dress with what expedition she could, swept down the shallow oak stairs to the library, where Mr. Ashley, erect upon the hearthrug, with his nose in the air and his coat-tails gathered up under his arms, was holding forth to a respectful feminine audience, much as you may see a Cochin-China cock in the farmyard crowing mellifluously to the admiration of his surrounding brood.

'Much of a muchness, the whole lot of 'em,' Jeanne heard him saying; 'but if you talk of lying, I must say that fellow Gombetter can give Gortschakoff pounds!'

After which, becoming aware of the presence of his niece, he fell to poking the fire with a good deal of needless noise, and remarked that the weather was really remarkably cold for the time of year.

Miss Barrington, with more tact, continued the subject.

'If I had to govern a nation,' said she, 'I think I should go in for a course of unscrupulous veracity, just to see how it would act. Bismarck is the only public man I know of who habitually tells the truth, and the consequence is that nobody can make him out. I remember once, some years ago, making a resolution to steer clear of fibs in my own small sphere; but it didn't do. As far as I can remember, I only kept it up for about a fortnight.'

Miss Barrington's remarks were listened to with that respectful deference which, in this country, can be commanded by

wealth alone. When she had done one of the young ladies exclaimed :

‘ Oh ! but, Miss Barrington, you never do tell fibs.’

The old lady’s eyes twinkled. ‘ Don’t I, my dear ? ’ returned she. ‘ How do you know ? Do you suppose such hardened old sinners as I are easily detected ? Helen Ashley is my goddaughter,’ she continued explanatorily, addressing herself to Jeanne ; ‘ that is why she takes such a favourable view of my character.’

And Jeanne noticed, with some surprise, that at this apparently innocent speech her uncle bit his nails and frowned, and Mrs. Ashley wriggled uneasily upon her chair, while a fine rich pink overspread the cheeks, forehead, and ears of the fair Helen.

The announcement of dinner put an end to a rather uncomfortable period of silence. Mr. Ashley gave his arm to Miss Barrington, and the rest of the party trooped out of the room after him.

Jeanne, scanning the spacious dining-room with the eager eyes of an explorer in unknown lands, received a favourable impression of English luxury. She had read, in I know not what book of ‘ Notes upon Great Britain,’ that the saturnine nature of the inhabitants of these islands is nowhere more vividly exemplified than in the aspect of that particular room in which their happiest moments are supposed to be passed. The writer, whose ideas may possibly have been formed in that gloomy part of London to which, for some inscrutable reason, foreigners chiefly resort, had drawn a graphic picture of a funereal apartment, furnished with a long table, a dozen or more horsehair chairs, a mahogany sideboard, a sarcophagus to keep the decanters in, a portrait in oil of the master of the house, and a print representing the coronation of Queen Victoria. ‘ There,’ he had concluded, ‘ you have the scene of those social banquets so dear to Englishmen. Admit that a man must drink a great deal of port wine before he can feel gay amidst such surroundings.’ The dining-room at Holmhurst by no means answered to this description. It was such a room as may be seen in scores of country houses of the less pretentious order—a room neither venerable in the way of old oak panelling, antlers, family portraits, and high-backed chairs, nor pseudo-venerable in one of the abominable theatrical styles affected by modern upholsterers, and dubbed ‘ Early English,’ ‘ Elizabethan,’ ‘ Jacobean,’ or what not—yet with a certain attractiveness of its own. The Turkey carpet, a little worn and faded in places ; the plain, solid furniture, dating apparently from the commencement of

the present century, and likely to see the end of it ; the fire that blazed in the ample grate, the fine damask tablecloth, the glittering silver, and the mellow, shaded light of the tall lamps—all these details of the picture which met Jeanne's eye made up a sufficiently pleasant whole ; and each and all of them seemed to wear a smile of quiet, conscious self-respect and prosperity, not unlike that which commonly illumined the features of their master about the dinner-hour.

The repast itself, to be sure, did not prove quite up to the Campagne de Mersac standard—being, indeed, of the kind usually set before her employers, in this favoured land, by a good plain cook with a kitchen-maid under her ; but such as the food was, there was plenty of it ; and the wine—if that had been a point within Jeanne's powers of criticism—was excellent. A portly butler, assisted by a hobbledehoy in livery, handed the plates, and doled out half-glasses of sherry from time to time. Miss Barrington had a special ciaret-jug at her elbow, and helped herself.

Mr. Ashley swallowed his soup, making a good deal of noise over it, and related the chief incidents of his journey, dwelling with some bitterness upon the senseless suspicion with which he had been met at the frontier.

‘As if any fool couldn't see that I was an Englishman !’ cried the worthy gentleman, reasonably enough. ‘I believe, upon my conscience, they'd have clapped me into jail if Jane, there, hadn't come to the rescue and made it all right,’ he added, nodding in a friendly manner at his niece.

‘If people would only take the trouble to learn modern languages when they were young,’ remarked Mrs. Ashley, addressing herself, as usual, to space ; ‘but, of course, in our time one's education was neglected as far as that sort of thing went. Nowadays it is different. We girls did learn French, German, and Italian ; and the same master, I remember, taught us all three ; but boys, of course—modern languages being an extra, and in play-hours and all—you couldn't expect it, could you ? unless they had a special turn that way, as some have. Our eldest boy, Jack, took up German for his examination at the Staff College at Sandhurst the other day, and got I don't know how many marks—such a good thing ! Not that it is likely to be of much use to him, as far as I can see ; and being such a long time away from his regiment and his brother officers, has been very tiresome for him ; and then there was all the hard work, and a good deal of expense in one way and another—still, of course, one is glad to think he has passed.’

No one ever dreamt of paying any attention to Mrs. Ashley's interminable semi-soliloquies. Her daughters talked through them without scruple, neither meaning offence nor giving any. By way of entertaining their guest, they confined their remarks entirely to the subject of Algeria, about which country they asked one well-meant, silly question after another, while Jeanne, bored but patient, answered to the best of her ability; and Mr. Ashley and Miss Barrington talked politics; and the dinner progressed through its prescribed courses.

When it was all over, the ladies betook themselves to the drawing-room, where the younger of the two sisters seated herself at the piano, while the elder warbled English ballads in a thin, faint voice, starting a trifle flat, and consistently remaining so up to the last note of her performance. Mrs. Ashley took up the *Queen*, and read occasional inaudible extracts from that voluminous journal, and Miss Barrington returned to her tatting. After what Jeanne had heard before dinner it would, perhaps, have evinced something more than mortal powers of self-control if she had abstained from seating herself beside the latter lady.

'You said Mr. Barrington was your nephew, did you not?' she asked, proceeding straight to the point with her usual directness.

'Yes. What did you think of him?'

Miss Barrington had a gruff voice, like a man's, and had cultivated a natural abruptness of manner, having found that the quickest and surest means of coming to an understanding with her fellow-creatures.

Jeanne thought the question rather in bad taste, and did not much like the tone in which it was delivered. She replied, however, without embarrassment, that she had found Mr. Barrington very amiable.

'Amiable!' echoed the old lady. 'What a very odd description of him! But I suppose you use the word in its French sense, *aimable*—lovable—eh? A good many people have found him that, by all accounts. Indeed, I am very fond of him myself, though he is a selfish rascal at heart, as most men are. He showed me a picture he had done of you; it was not flattered.'

Jeanne laughed. 'Is he—at home now?' she asked, after a short pause.

'No,' answered the old lady, looking up from her tatting, 'he is not; he is away paying visits in different parts of the country.'

Miss Barrington's keen black eyes had found out many a secret in their time by mere force of tacit interrogation; but they failed to extract any information from the beautiful, pale face upon which they were now fastened.

'I am sorry for that,' observed Jeanne, calmly. 'Mr. Barrington was a great deal at our house while he was in Algiers, and I should have liked to have met him again.'

Was she sorry? She was saying to herself that she was glad—that she was intensely relieved. And yet there was a dull sort of pain about her heart, suspiciously like disappointment.

'He will return home before Christmas, I have no doubt, and then you will be able to renew your acquaintance with him,' said Miss Barrington, drily, and with that she changed the subject.

After a time Mr. Ashley came in from the dining-room, rubbing his eyes and yawning. The clock on the mantelpiece struck ten, and one of the girls rang the bell. Suddenly, Mrs. Ashley scrambled up from her low chair, made a futile grab at her cap, which had fallen on to the back of her head again, and hurried across the room to Jeanne.

'Nous allons faire la prière,' said she. 'Si vous avez des scrupules——'

The servants came in, in a long line, while she was speaking. Mr. Ashley was turning over the leaves of a large, gilt-edged Bible, and adjusting his spectacles. For a moment Jeanne was seized with that queer, bewildering sensation—to which no one is a stranger—of having been in the same place, and under precisely similar circumstances, before. Then she remembered the description Léon had given of life at Holmhurst upon his return to Algiers, and how he had claimed to have earned the good opinion of his relations by his repudiation of bigotry. With that reminiscence before her, she hastened to reassure her aunt, and the ceremony proceeded.

It is to be feared, however, that Jeanne's heart was not in her devotions that evening, and that she might just as well have retired for any good she got from them; for while Mr. Ashley was offering up a somewhat hasty, but comprehensive supplication for the welfare of all mankind, one, at least, of those who should have been supporting him in his modest demands was many miles away, in the cool dining-room of the Campagne de Mersac. The sun was streaming through the open windows; the wind was scattering the almond blossoms

outside ; the shrill voices of Madame de Breuil's visitors rose and fell in the adjoining *salon* ; a handsome, bright-eyed lad was sitting on a corner of the table swinging his long legs, chatting about England and Paris, and waxing enthusiastic in his praise of a certain Englishman named Barrington whom he had brought to Africa with him. All this took place long, long ago—eight months or so, in point of fact—and many people and many things had had time to die since then, hope and joy among the rest. 'If only I were dead too !' sighed poor Jeanne, upon her knees.

'Amen,' says Mr. Ashley briskly, shutting up his book. And so one more day is at an end, and everybody may go to bed ; and those who can't sleep must bear their own burden, and hope to be a little more tired to-morrow night.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH JEANNE TAKES A WALK.

MR. ASHLEY, who was a thoroughgoing Conservative in practice as well as in principle, clung to the observance of many old customs in his household from no other motive than an inherent dislike of change. It was by his orders that the great bell at the top of the house was rung, for some two or three minutes, every morning as the clock struck eight, rousing the slumbering echoes, setting the dogs in the stableyard barking, and causing visitors to begin the day with bad words. In Mr. Ashley's father's time, or in his grandfather's, this untimely clamour had probably had its justification as a summons to the first meal of the day ; it survived now, without any justification at all, much as the curfew still continues to toll the knell of parting day in certain remote villages.

The dull, grey light was just stealing through Jeanne's window-curtains, on the morning after her arrival at Holmhurst, when she was startled by this prolonged din ; but as it was clearly out of the question that she could now be in time to present herself at any rite or meeting which it might herald, she wisely turned round and fell asleep again, having, indeed, had but a small part of her fair share of rest during the night. About an hour later she was again aroused by that peculiarly

irritating rat-a-tat-tat at her door of which the knuckles of English servants possess the secret, and a maid came in with a bath and cans of water, and Mrs. Hashley's love, and would she please 'ave her breakfuss in her room or downstairs?

Having received this young person's assurances that there was no 'urry, Jeanne answered that she would go downstairs as soon as she was dressed, and succeeded eventually in reaching the dining-room just as Miss Barrington was leaving it.

'Good morning,' said that lady. 'You ain't very early people in your part of the world, I see.'

'I am very sorry. Have I kept them waiting?' asked Jeanne, apprehensively.

'Dear me, no! Punctuality is the soul of business; but if you haven't any business to do, what's the use of being punctual? The only reason why I stay in this house is that I can do exactly as I like in it. They don't keep things hot for you though, and therefore I make a point of being in the dining-room at half-past nine.'

Mrs. Ashley rose from behind her urn and teacups to extend a hand holding a large piece of buttered toast to her niece. Becoming aware, by a slight hesitation on Jeanne's part, of this obstacle in the way of a friendly greeting, she hastily got rid of it by thrusting it into the open mouth of Turco, who stood gravely beside her, and who promptly deposited it on the carpet, being unused to such cavalier manners.

'Eat it up, there's a dear dog!' said Mrs. Ashley, soothingly. 'What a splendid fellow he is! So glad to have him here; we are all devoted to dogs. I hope you slept well, my dear. We didn't wait, you see—we never do; I find it is the only plan. Tea or coffee? Your uncle has gone out hunting; he started hours ago. They meet beyond Westerham to-day—or was it Edenbridge? I often say to him that he is getting too old to rush all over the county to these far meets, only it makes him angry to be told so; but really, you know, to have a twenty mile ride home, after it is all over, is too much; and the result of it is that he comes in tired out, and falls asleep after dinner, which is so bad. What shall we do to amuse you to-day? You will find us very humdrum people, I'm afraid; but at all events our life will be a change from what you have been accustomed to, and that is always something. Helen, my dear, you must look after your cousin. What are you going to do this morning?'

'Blanche and I were going down to the village to buy some

things,' answered the elder of the two girls; 'but that is of no consequence. Unfortunately,' she continued, turning to Jeanne, with a little apologetic laugh, 'there is nothing interesting to be seen in our neighbourhood—no cathedrals, or show places, or anything of that kind. When strangers come to stay with us, we generally drive them up to the common to look at the view, only at this time of year there hardly ever *is* any view, because of the fog. Still, if you would care about going there on the chance——'

'I would rather walk to the village with you,' said Jeanne. 'Is that the village, beyond those trees?'

'Oh, no,' answered Helen; 'that is the keeper's cottage at Broadridge, where Mr. Barrington lives. You knew Mr. Barrington in Algiers, didn't you?'

'Isn't he nice? Isn't he amusing? Didn't you like him very much?' chimed in Blanche, the younger sister, who was a trifle given to enthusiasm.

Jeanne said she had thought Mr. Barrington charming, and returned to her breakfast, not feeling inclined to pursue the subject further at that moment.

She recurred to it, however, of her own accord an hour later, when she and her cousins were walking briskly across the park, escorted by some half-dozen dogs of all sizes.

'Mr. Barrington is your nearest neighbour; I suppose you see him very often?' she remarked interrogatively.

'Some of us do, don't we, Helen?' said Blanche.

At which her sister smiled demurely, and retorted, 'How silly you are, Blanche!'

'Why silly?' Jeanne inquired, looking down, from her superior height, at the fresh-coloured young woman at her side, with perhaps the faintest tinge of unconscious disdain in her eyes.

The dimples in Miss Ashley's cheeks became more perceptible. She was a rather pretty girl—sufficiently so to be considered a beauty by her brothers and sisters, who, like the members of many other large families, had, from their youth up, formed a sort of mutual admiration league. 'Blanche is always teasing me about Mr. Barrington,' she explained. 'It is all nonsense, and I wish she would not do it, because it sets people talking, and you have no idea what a gossiping neighbourhood this is. We are great friends—nothing more. I think it is very hard that one mayn't have a friend without everybody making disagreeable remarks about it, don't you?'

To judge by her face, she did not feel the hardship very keenly; and possibly that may have been why Jeanne did not judge it necessary to respond to her appeal for sympathy.

'After all, Helen,' said Blanche, picking up a fir-cone, and throwing it for the dogs to scamper after, 'it is not very odd that people should notice your friendships, because, you know, your friends always *do* propose to you, sooner or later.'

'Nonsense, my dear child,' replied the elder sister, speaking in that patronising tone which is the prerogative of superior age and experience; 'Mr. Barrington has never done anything of the kind.'

'Oh, I know that,' cried the other innocently. 'Of course, if he had——' She broke off with an embarrassed laugh, and resumed hurriedly, 'I wish he would, and that you would accept him. It would be such fun to have him for a brother-in-law.'

'Blanche,' said Helen, with some severity, 'you allow your tongue to run away with you. I don't know what Jeanne will think of us.'

The second Miss Ashley resembled the elder as a bad photograph resembles its original. She had the same colouring, only less brilliant; the same features, but less refined; her hands were redder and her feet larger than her sister's. Providence seemed to have destined her to play the part of second fiddle, which part, for that matter, she accepted cheerfully enough. She had as yet had no proposals, and no 'friends,' in her acceptation of the term, nor did she expect any so long as the beauty of the family should remain unmarried. Her humble estimate of her own merits had hitherto been entirely concurred in by others; and Jeanne, who, during the above brief dialogue, had made up her mind that she liked her younger cousin the best of the two, was probably the very first person who had arrived at such a conclusion. But Jeanne was perhaps hardly a fair judge, being susceptible of the passion of jealousy in common with poor humanity at large.

Such faint predisposition as she may have had in Miss Ashley's favour was certainly not increased by the latter's next remarks. 'I hope you understand, Jeanne, that Blanche is only talking nonsense. Mr. Barrington is really nothing but a very old friend of mine, and we all like him very much. Everybody does, I think. Did not you, when you knew him in Algiers? But perhaps you were too much taken up with *somebody else* to pay much attention to him. Do tell me what

M. de Saint-Luc is like ; I want so much to hear all about him. Is he young and good-looking ? And is he tall or short ?—dark or fair ? You don't mind my asking, *do you ?*

Jeanne did mind very much, but could hardly say so in so many words. The tone of her reply, however, showed unequivocally enough that the subject was not one upon which she was inclined to be communicative.

'M. de Saint-Luc is tall and dark. I believe he is considered handsome. I have not asked his age, but he is not a very young man,' she answered. 'Do you have a great deal of rain here in winter ?'

The Miss Ashleys, upon comparing notes later in the day, agreed that their French cousin was extremely reserved, and not over and above friendly.

Broadridge is a tiny, old-fashioned village, which has preserved much of the picturesqueness of a bygone day, chiefly by reason of the æsthetic proclivities of the lord of the manor, to whom the desolating inroads of modern sanitary reform have ever been as a red rag to a bull. Drainage is all very well, he says ; and he has nothing to urge against cleanliness, except that he does not believe in the possibility of enforcing it ; but he protests against the removal of thatched roofs and diamond-paned windows ; and any cottager who takes it into his head to tear down creepers, upon the plea that his dwelling needs more light, may count upon being entered in Mr. Barrington's black books. Externally, therefore, the village leaves little to be desired. Jeanne was enchanted with it.

'What a lovely little place !' she exclaimed. 'The labourers in England cannot be so badly off as people pretend, if they all have such homes as these to live in.

'Yes, it is rather pretty, in a way,' acquiesced Helen, dubiously ; 'but it is a dull, sleepy little hole. There is only one shop in it, and they keep nothing there except string and tallow-candles and brandy-balls, and things of that kind, which nobody can want. We can't get so much as a bit of ribbon or a hair-pin nearer than Westerham ; it is very inconvenient.'

'But it would be much worse to have a common, ugly town at your gates,' said Jeanne.

'That is what Mr. Barrington always tells us,' remarked Blanche. Whereupon Jeanne began to speak of something else. She might have spared herself the trouble ; for as for excluding Barrington's name from the conversation, it would have been as easy to exclude one of the parts of speech. His sayings and

doings, his feats, his fancies, and his jokes, formed themes for perpetual comment and admiration—not upon this occasion only, but every day and all day ; and Mr. and Mrs. Ashley were not less prone to expatiate upon them than their daughters. No sooner did one member of the family desist from singing the praises of this fortunate gentleman, than another was sure to take up the strain, insomuch that even Jeanne used occasionally to wish that they would discuss somebody else for a little. Not, indeed, that she was weary of the subject itself, but that there was a certain sense of proprietorship in their treatment of it which annoyed her, though she hardly knew why. Miss Barrington, devoted though she was to her nephew, used to say that, after spending a week at Holmhurst, she could have borne with equanimity, not to say pleasure, to see Harry ducked in the village horsepond.

‘ You, who know my nephew, must be rather amused at the way in which he is spoken of here,’ she remarked, one day, to Jeanne. ‘ I often wonder what sort of monster a man such as they describe would be. Three grains of Marcus Aurelius to three of Shakspeare, six of Solomon, and two of the infant Samuel, with a dash of Joe Miller, by way of flavouring. The whole to be well shaken, and swallowed with closed eyes. What a nauseous draught! Unprejudiced people, like yourself, for instance, are aware that the poor man has done nothing to be so travestied, but is in reality a very pleasant sort of fellow, with considerably more of the goose than of the swan in his composition.’

Jeanne answered, not very truthfully, that she had hardly known Mr. Barrington well enough to have been able to form a judgment of his character, but that no doubt he had as many faults as other people. She would have given a good deal to have been able to question Miss Barrington as to the real state of his relations with Helen Ashley, but pride kept her silent, and the old lady did not volunteer any information.

When Jeanne had been long enough at Holmhurst to have become accustomed to its daily ways, and had so far taken her place as part and parcel of the establishment that she was allowed to employ her time much as she liked, that her aunt and cousins no longer thought it necessary to provide amusement for her, and that Mr. Ashley had given up opening the door for her when she left the room—when, I say, our heroine had been about a week under her uncle’s roof, it occurred to her, one misty, chilly afternoon, that she would like to walk

across the park, and take a look at Mr. Barrington's home. There was nothing to prevent her from gratifying her curiosity, for only a park paling divided the modest Holmhurst property from its more pretentious neighbour, and this paling was crossed, at a point that Jeanne knew of, by a stile, beyond which a faintly-marked footpath stretched away, across the undulating expanse, till it lost itself in a belt of trees. The girls had more than once offered to walk with Jeanne along this path, which, they said, led past the windows of Broadridge Court, and over which, as being a short cut to many places, they and their friends enjoyed, by courtesy, a right of way; but she had hitherto excused herself from any such expedition, having a foolish repugnance to making her first acquaintance with the place in Helen's company. Now, however, all the other inmates of the house had gone out on different errands, and the occasion appeared favourable to her for a long ramble, with no other society than that of the faithful Turco and of her own thoughts.

It was one of those still, grey days of early winter, the peculiar property of our climate, which to some people are unspeakably depressing, but move others with a certain charm of peaceful melancholy. In the morning a heavy mist had hung over all the country; but this had partially cleared off now, leaving only drops of moisture upon every blade of grass and bare twig. The outline of the chalk hills in the distance was blurred and faint; but here and there, upon the ploughed fields and pasture lands which trended upwards towards them, fell a gleam of pale light, testifying that somewhere, far above layers upon layers of woolly clouds, the sun was shining. The last yellow leaves of the year were dropping from the oaks and elms, and came fluttering to the ground, one by one, as Jeanne passed on her way beneath the branches. The heavy, humid air was motionless and silent—so silent that Jeanne, as she walked, could hear distinctly the tramp, tramp of a man's footsteps on the further side of the paling. She paused for an instant, as the sound became louder and nearer, and half-thought of turning back, for she did not wish to meet anyone; but remembering that, whoever the pedestrian might be, he could hardly be of her acquaintance, she resumed her march, and was within a couple of yards of the stile at the moment when Barrington, reaching it from the other side, dropped his arms upon its topmost rail, and so stood face to face with her.

For once, it was Jeanne who was the less self-possessed of

the two. A low involuntary cry escaped her, and she felt herself trembling from head to foot.

Barrington started and flushed a little, but recovered himself instantly. He took off his hat, smiled, and said, 'How do you do?' in such an easy, matter-of-course tone that a far less proud person than Mademoiselle de Mersac must have been stung into emulating his *sang-froid*.

She drew nearer to him at once, held out her hand, and answered. 'How do you do? You startled me by appearing so suddenly. You are the last person in the world whom I should have expected to meet.'

'Well, I live here, you know,' observed Barrington.

'Yes, but I thought you were away.'

'I came back last night,' he said.

'Oh.'

A long pause. The situation was becoming a trifle ludicrous. Jeanne, who habitually looked at things in their truer and more serious aspect, and was, in a manner, above noticing small absurdities, was conscious only of the tumult of mingled love and joy and pain and bitter humiliation, which was swelling within her, and of the necessity for keeping any of these emotions from showing itself in her face; but Barrington, though he, on his side, was experiencing much the same sensations in a somewhat less degree, and had never in his life felt more indisposed towards real mirth, was yet alive to the comic element which lurks in almost every conceivable human position, and, upon the faintest provocation, would have burst out laughing.

Happily, he was preserved from thus disgracing himself. Jeanne broke the silence at last, and spoke with so successful an assumption of calm friendliness that she drove a pin into his self-love; and in pangs of that description Mr. Barrington had never, from his childhood, been able to see anything laughable.

'I am very glad to meet you again,' said she. 'I was afraid that perhaps you would not return before I had gone away. Have you been quite well since you left Algiers?'

'I have been tolerably well, thank you,' answered Barrington, making the admission with some reluctance. In truth, he was the picture of health, as he always was.

'You were going to walk through the park?' he resumed presently. 'Perhaps you will allow me to act as guide to you.'

Jeanne would have liked to say that she had walked far enough, and must return home; but fearing the construction

that he might place upon such a speech, answered simply, 'Thank you, if you will be so kind ;' and, stepping over the stile, allowed her finger-tips to rest for a moment upon the hand which Barrington held out to help her across.

They paced silently side by side for a few minutes over the fallen leaves. Then Barrington remarked, 'It is so strange to see you in England !'

'You did not seem much surprised to see me,' said Jeanne.

'No, because I knew you were here.'

'Did you? Ah, through Miss Barrington, I suppose. I don't think she expected you home quite so soon as this.'

'I did not myself expect to be home before Christmas, if then. I was staying with some people in the Midlands when I got my aunt's letter, and the next day I made a start southwards.'

The inference was obvious, but Jeanne ignored it ; indeed, she could scarcely have done otherwise.

'I am not at all disappointed in England,' she observed, just by way of steering the conversation into a less difficult channel.

'Are you not? And yet most people would tell you that you could hardly have chosen a worse time of year for seeing the country. For my own part, I rather like the fall of the leaf. There is a subdued softness of colouring about our rainy landscapes at this season which you don't meet with anywhere else ; and sometimes one gets some wonderful cloud effects towards sunset. Besides, when one always feels sad oneself there is a sort of pleasure in seeing Nature sad too.'

Barrington sighed as he spoke, and looked dismal enough. Jeanne, glancing at him for a moment, believed, with a pang that was not altogether painful, that the man was really unhappy. As, indeed, why should she not, seeing that, at the time, he sincerely believed it himself. It is not given to everyone—perhaps, if the truth were known, it is given only to a very few—to realise what love and hate, joy and sorrow, are. Men, like Barrington, who are in the habit of analysing their emotions, and dwelling upon them with a certain satisfaction, usually feel less deeply than their neighbours, though, of course, they would be the last to acknowledge it. He thought he loved Jeanne de Mersac as dearly as ever man had loved woman since the world began ; he did, in fact, love her with all the warmth of which his nature was capable, and it was not his fault if he could do no more.

‘I am sorry that you feel sad,’ said Jeanne, hurriedly. Then, fearing to continue the subject, she added, almost in the same breath, ‘I have never seen your house yet. Is that it, beyond the trees?’

‘Yes, that’s the house,’ answered Barrington. ‘You will see it better presently. It isn’t much to look at nowadays. Once upon a time—three centuries ago, or thereabouts—it must have been a fine place; but it has had many owners, and a deal of rough treatment; and now nobody would imagine, from the appearance of it, that it dates from the reign of Queen Elizabeth. First one wing of it was burnt down, and never rebuilt—that was in the beginning of the last century. Then the Barrington of those days—being, I should imagine, under the influence of drink—took it into his head to knock out all the old mullioned windows, and replace them by the hideous oblong apertures that you see. His successor, not wishing to be outdone in originality, added a Greek portico with six massive stuccoed pillars to the building. That you do not see, because I have made so bold as to remove it. I am not sure whether my grandfather made matters better or worse by throwing out those two bays. They must have looked frightful at first, but now that the colour of the brick has toned down and that the creepers have covered them, they are not altogether objectionable; and, of course, so far as the interior is concerned, they are an improvement.

‘I think it is a beautiful old house,’ said Jeanne. And so, indeed, thought most people, Barrington among the rest. He affected, however, to have but a poor opinion of it, as being his own.

‘Old it is—at least, rather old,’ he said; ‘but it is hardly to be called beautiful. I am fond of it myself, but that has nothing to do with its intrinsic merits. Even looked at from without, there is not much to be said for it; and when you have inspected the inside, as I hope you will do some day, you will agree with me that it is too hideous for anything. Do you remember my telling you about it, one day, in Algiers?’

‘Yes,’ said Jeanne, ‘I remember.’

‘How I wish those days could come back?’ sighed Barrington. ‘I little thought then——’

He broke off to give Jeanne the opportunity of inquiring what it was that had been so far from his thoughts; but as she did not see fit to gratify him in this way he was fain to resume:

‘It is just as well that one can never in the least guess what the future is likely to be. If I had known then under what circumstances I was to meet you in England, I should certainly never have wished for the opportunity of showing you my poor house.’

‘Nor should I have wished to see it,’ said Jeanne.

‘You did wish to see it, then, at the time?’

‘I thought I should like it; but I was not so anxious for the pleasure that I should have desired it if I had known that I should only come to England because of our dear Madame de Breuil’s death and of this miserable war.’

‘Oh, the war; I wasn’t thinking of the war,’ said Barrington, rather chafallen.

‘No?’

‘No, I was thinking of—well, you know, I told you plainly in my letter what my feeling was about your engagement.’

‘What do you call *roses trémières* in English?’ asked Jeanne, pausing before a fine specimen of that flower, for they had now passed through a wicket-gate, and were in the old-fashioned garden which surrounds Broadridge Court.

‘I’m sure I don’t know—that is, of course, I do know—hollyhocks. And I apologise for having ventured to speak as if I were one of your friends,’ answered Barrington, with his nose very much in the air.

‘You said once that you wished me to consider you as my friend, and I have always done so,’ returned Jeanne, gravely; ‘but there are many things that it is best not to talk of, even to one’s friends.’

‘If friendship means anything at all,’ said Barrington, decidedly, and a little sulkily, ‘it means confidence.’

‘And what,’ inquired Jeanne, ‘do you wish me to confide to you?’

This query implied rather more than Barrington was prepared to reveal upon the spur of the moment. He assumed a less injured air, however, and answered:

‘Well, for one thing, I wish to know when you are to be married?’

‘There is no date fixed,’ replied Jeanne, with perfect composure. ‘How could there be, when everything is so uncertain? But I suppose my marriage will take place soon after peace is signed, if it ever—’

‘If it ever *what*?’

‘I was going to say, if it ever takes place at all. You must

understand that, in these times, it is not possible to feel quite sure about anything.'

'Would you feel happier if you were sure?' asked Barrington, wheeling suddenly round, and looking her full in the face.

A natural shade of resentment, called forth by this unwarrantable persecution, enabled Jeanne to respond with the greater appearance of indifference.

'If I were not satisfied,' said she, 'I should scarcely be inclined to talk about it. Unless you have some more questions to ask I will say good-bye now, for it is getting late.'

'Won't you come into the house?' asked Barrington, imploringly.

'Some other time, if you will allow me. It is too late now.'

'I have not offended you, have I?'

'Not in the least. I am not easily offended. But I do not like being out after dark, and it is so cold and damp this evening. Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' said Barrington, taking off his hat, and holding the gate open for her.

He did not offer to escort her across the park, but stood looking after her receding figure till it was lost in the gathering gloom. Then he went straight into the house and into his luxurious study, where a gentleman in a brown velvet coat and muddy gaiters was dozing before the fire.

'Leigh, old man,' said he, 'it is all over with me. I have seen her again.'

'Oh, have you?'

'I have; and, what's more, I mean to marry her.'

'Oh, you do?'

'Yes, I do.'

'And what about t'other girl?'

'You have a disgustingly vulgar way of putting things, Leigh. I have never proposed to "t'other girl," as you call her, and I never shall.'

'I wish to goodness,' said Mr. Leigh, getting up and stretching himself, 'that you would propose to them both, and that they would both refuse you. It would do you all the good in the world.'

CHAPTER XXX.

JEANNE GAINS A NEW FRIEND.

MR. ASHLEY, returning home late from hunting, found a note awaiting him, which he carried down with him to the library, before dinner, and held in his hand as he stood in his favourite attitude upon the hearthrug.

‘Here’s a bit of news for you all,’ said he, tapping the open sheet with his blunt forefinger; ‘Barrington’s back.’

Each member of his small audience, except Jeanne, promptly responded, ‘Oh!’ The latter, in the course of her recent studies of the English language, as spoken in the land of its origin, had already had occasion to notice the important part played by this compendious monosyllable in our conversation, and the infinity of meanings which, by variety of inflection, it can be made to bear.

‘Came back last night, he tells me,’ Mr. Ashley went on; ‘and he says, if we’ll have him, he should like to come up and dine to-morrow night, so as to have a talk with me about those dogs, you know. Of course we shall be very pleased to see him, and I’ve written to tell him to bring a friend he has staying with him too. Only, you know,’ continued the practical Mr. Ashley, ‘it isn’t much use his coming up to look at the pups at that time of night. Odd that he should have chosen such an hour.’

‘Very,’ said Miss Barrington, drily.

Helen looked conscious, Blanche laughed, and a gradual smile dawned upon Mr. Ashley’s lips, and spread itself over his bucolic features. These good people thought they knew pretty well what had induced Mr. Barrington to offer himself as their guest; and Jeanne, perceiving their thoughts, felt a sudden, sharp pang, of which she was so ashamed that she hastened to stifle it under a forced access of high spirits. She talked a great deal more than usual throughout the evening, and made a point of laughing heartily at her uncle’s ponderous jokes, inasmuch that Miss Barrington, for one, immediately detected the spurious nature of her gaiety, and began to wonder what it might be intended to conceal.

In truth, Jeanne, reserved and self-possessed though she was, was no great adept in the art of concealment. It had

never been her habit to practise small social hypocrisies, and probably no amount of training would ever have made her into anything but a deplorable actress. But if simulated emotion were not one of her strong points, she had, by way of counterpoise, a fine supply of natural composure wherewith to clothe that which she really felt; and of this fact Mr. Barrington was somewhat painfully reminded when he made his entrance, on the following evening, at the dinner-hour.

He had driven his old friend and schoolfellow, Leigh, over from Broadridge in a dog-cart, and had beguiled the way by descanting upon the awkwardness and difficulty of his position—he being, as he alleged, desperately in love with one of the ladies whom he was about to meet, while he more than hinted that another was no less desperately enamoured of himself. He had even gone so far as to express some contrition for his past conduct towards the latter, and to blame himself for having excited hopes which could now never be realised.

‘I really am a most unfortunate beggar,’ he had sighed. ‘I suppose it is my confounded impulsiveness that is always getting me into trouble. How I am to escape from this house to-night without putting my foot into it somehow is more than I can imagine.’

Whereupon Mr. Leigh had replied by pertinently inquiring why the deuce he was going there then.

And now, behold, not only did Mademoiselle de Mersac, after a few words of friendly, unembarrassed greeting, turn away to listen to Mrs. Ashley’s rambling account of the village clothing-club, but even Helen, being moved by some impulse of coquetry or curiosity, must needs devote her small conversational powers to the entertainment of the stranger; so that the irresistible Barrington had to fall back, with as good a grace as might be, upon his aunt Susan.

That lady made things pleasant for him by asking what had brought him home a good three weeks before his time; and getting no satisfactory answer to this question, went on to remark, in a loud and resolute voice, that it wasn’t the slightest use trying to hoodwink *her*, and that when people were so very mysterious about their movements one might be tolerably sure, as a general thing, that they had something to be ashamed of.

‘I have always a great deal to be ashamed of,’ Barrington answered. To which his aunt rejoined tartly, ‘So I should think.’

Barrington, who did not consider himself rich enough to be

able to view with indifference the opinions of a well-dowered maiden aunt, felt that he was not beginning the evening happily.

Nor were the Fates any kinder to him at the dinner-table. It was in the natural course of things that he should be placed next to his hostess; but what he had not bargained for was that Helen should occupy the seat upon his other hand, and that Jeanne, upon the opposite side of the table, should be monopolised by Mr. Leigh, with whom—to use that favoured gentleman's own phrase—she 'got on like a house on fire.'

Mr. Leigh was a good-natured, well-to-do bachelor, living, for the most part, in clubs and among men, yet not insensible to the charms of female loveliness when chance threw such blessings in his path; a man with a large acquaintance and many friends, with good looks, good health, a fair amount of information, and a sufficiency of small talk. He amused Jeanne, and took some pains to achieve this result, for he had been much struck by the attractiveness of her person and carriage. Barrington was not jealous of his friend. He knew that Leigh was not a marrying man, and was, besides, too self-satisfied—or, as he would have put it, too philosophical—to give way easily to such a weakness. At the same time he had not come to Holmhurst that evening to introduce Jeanne to a new acquaintance; and so it fell out that he gave some offence to his right-hand neighbour by an unusual taciturnity and absence of mind. As for Mrs. Ashley, who sat on his left, she was not accustomed to being either answered or listened to, and did not, therefore, notice anything strange in the manner of her prospective son-in-law.

But of course in due time Barrington got the opportunity he desired. Later in the evening, after the ladies had withdrawn, he slipped away from the dining-table, over which Mr. Ashley and Leigh, assisted by memory and imagination, were complacently hunting every county in England, and, entering the drawing-room simultaneously with the butler and the tea-tray, steered straight for the sofa where Jeanne was seated alone. He had based his calculations upon a long experience of the changeless customs of Holmhurst, and these were fully justified by the event. Helen and Blanche were at the grand-piano, producing subdued discord, Aunt Susan was bending over her tatting and warming her toes before the fire; and Mrs. Ashley, with her cap hanging by a single hairpin, was nodding drowsily over the advertisement sheet of the *Times*, keeping up a dropping fire of inaudible comments the while upon the family events

recorded therein. The Holmhurst drawing-room has no lack of space, and Jeanne was, for all needful purposes, alone in it.

‘At last!’ ejaculated Barrington, with a sigh of satisfaction, as he sank down upon the cushions beside her.

Very likely the words may have found an echo in Jeanne’s heart; but, if so, they remained there, and did not rise to her lips.

‘You do not follow the English habit of drinking wine after your dinner?’ said she, inquiringly.

‘As a general thing, I do,’ answered Barrington. ‘It is a very agreeable and sensible sort of habit, I think; only there are occasions, every now and then, when one may employ one’s time even more agreeably by abandoning it.’

Jeanne smiled. She had made up her mind to avoid Mr. Barrington; but it was impossible for her to carry out her resolution at this moment without making it more apparent than she desired to do; and why, she thought, should she not enjoy the happiness of sitting beside him and hearing his voice, since the situation was none of her seeking?

‘Have you been painting a great deal since I saw you last?’ she asked.

‘No; scarcely at all,’ answered Barrington. ‘For a long time I could not bear the sight of paint or brushes, because they reminded me so of Algiers; and then, when I did take them up again, I hadn’t the patience to finish anything I had begun.’

‘You were always a little impatient, I think,’ observed Jeanne.

‘Do you?’ returned Barrington, wonderingly. ‘Well, now, that is really a very odd thing. I don’t think I ever was told before that I was impatient. On the contrary, I have always been considered so particularly even-tempered and easy-going. When could I have shown any signs of impatience before you, I wonder?’

‘I dare say I could give you several instances if I were to think about it,’ answered Jeanne, laughing. ‘Have you forgotten that evening at Fort Napoléon, when you were so very much annoyed because I kept you sitting out in front of the hotel for half-an-hour?’

‘Excuse me, it was not half-an-hour, but a good two hours. And being kept waiting did not annoy me in the least—if I was annoyed. Oh, dear me! what a long time ago it seems!’

‘Yes, a long time.’

‘How I wish those days were back again! How I wish I

had not left Algiers when I did! I found my sister perfectly well, by-the-bye, when I reached London. That is to say, that I didn't find her at all, because she had gone off to Brighton for change of air. They galvanised her, or electrified her, or something, and she hopped out of bed as brisk as a bee.'

'You must have been very glad.'

'Glad? Well, yes, of course one was glad in one way; but it was rather exasperating to have been dragged, post-haste, all the way from Africa for no reason at all. And do you know,' continued Barrington, lowering his voice and speaking more gravely, 'I can't help thinking sometimes that, if I had remained in Algiers, things might have turned out differently.'

'What things?' Jeanne asked. But she knew very well what he meant.

Barrington paused: he was always pausing at critical moments. And just now his pause happened to coincide with a general silence, for Helen had either reached the end of her stock of ballads, or did not care about wasting her voice upon so unappreciative an audience; or it may well be that the spectacle of her cousin's prolonged *tête-à-tête* with Mr. Barrington was not quite an agreeable one to her. She glanced across the room at the pair—at Jeanne, in her black dress, reclining in a corner of the sofa, and fanning herself gently—at Barrington, with his elbows resting on his knees, and his chin on his hands, looking eagerly into his companion's face—Helen, I say, glanced at this *tableau*, and her pink cheeks became pinker, and a flash shot from her pale blue eyes, and she slammed down the piano with a noise that made Miss Barrington start round in her chair.

'My dear child,' said the old lady, reprovingly, 'if you particularly wish to see me jump out of my skin, by all means get a paper bag and blow it out, and bang it close to my ear; but don't destroy your father's property.'

'I beg your pardon,' said poor Helen, meekly. And then the two gentlemen came in from the dining-room, and Mrs. Ashley woke up and felt for her cap.

Leigh, one of the most good-natured of men, took in the situation at a glance, and, advancing towards the two daughters of the house, began doing his best to entertain them. But, in spite of this considerate conduct on the part of his friend, Barrington's chance for that evening was lost. Mr. Ashley, in high good humour after his dinner and his bottle of claret, thought it to plant himself directly in front of his niece.

'Why, Jane,' cried he, 'what's all this I hear of you from Barrington? He tells me you are one of the best horsewomen he ever saw. God bless my soul! why didn't you say so before? I could have given you a mount, and introduced you to fox-hunting, the finest sport in the whole world, and I don't care who denies it! My girls, you see, are not much use in the saddle, so I haven't got what you could call a regular lady's horse in my stable; but if you think you could manage one of mine——'

'Mademoiselle de Mersac could manage any horse,' said Barrington. 'She has broken in many an Arab colt before now, and that is more than some men whom I know could do.'

'You don't tell me so!' exclaimed Mr. Ashley, much impressed. 'Well, there's the Mammoth, she might have him.'

'The Mammoth wouldn't do at all,' said Barrington, decisively. 'I don't mean to say that Mademoiselle de Mersac couldn't ride him, but he pulls like a steam-engine, and he has the paces of a dray-horse—begging your pardon, Mr. Ashley. No; what I was thinking of was that little chestnut mare of mine. She is fretful and fidgety with a man on her back, but a lady, with a light hand, could do anything with her.'

Mr. Ashley looked grave. 'We mustn't break Jane's neck,' he said. 'That mare of yours wants riding, Barrington.'

'Exactly so,' replied Barrington, 'and Mademoiselle de Mersac can ride. Otherwise, you may be sure that I should never have proposed such a mount to her. I wish you would do me the honour to try the mare,' he continued, turning to Jeanne.

'Well, if you think it's all right, Barrington, I don't know why she shouldn't. It'll be something for you to tell your French friends, Jane, that you have ridden to hounds in England,' said Mr. Ashley, who really felt that the distinction thus earned would be no slight one.

'I should like a ride very much, but I would rather not hunt,' answered Jeanne, being in some uncertainty as to how far ladies were permitted to dispense with a chaperon in England.

'You'll be as safe on the mare as you are on this sofa,' said Barrington, misinterpreting her reluctance.

'I'll take care of you,' added Mr. Ashley, reassuringly.

And then Leigh, who had basely deserted his post to listen to the discussion, chimed in with, 'Do come, mademoiselle.'

All this was rather hard upon Helen, who did not hunt,

and who had hitherto been accustomed to receive the ready homage of all male visitors to Holmhurst. Possibly Jeanne may have noticed the gathering clouds upon her cousin's brow; at all events she rose from her sofa, and saying, 'Thank you, but I do not wish it,' crossed the room, and seated herself beside Miss Barrington.

Miss Barrington's sharp black eyes rested upon her neighbour with a look of admiration not unmingled with respect. This wrinkled old woman, who had been beautiful once, and might have married well over and over again had she been so minded, liked nothing better than to see men, as she said, 'kept in their proper place.' The girls of the present day, she often complained, had neither the power nor the will to do this, seeking husbands instead of allowing themselves to be sought, and thereby utterly failing in their duty to their sex. So, when Jeanne, in her cool, imperial manner, said, 'I do not wish it,' Miss Barrington's heart warmed to her.

There are so many ways of saying 'I do not wish it.' The words, which, coming from most people, would have sounded ungracious, and from many simply ridiculous, did not appear either the one or the other as they fell from Jeanne's lips, which were curved into a faint, grave smile as she spoke. She had not the slightest intention of putting anyone in his proper place, but was merely expressing her determination in her customary unambiguous way; and so she was understood by the three men, who made no attempt to pursue the subject further. Upon Miss Barrington's mind, however, the little scene produced a more lasting impression. From that hour Jeanne became to her an interesting study, and she resolved to see more of this strange girl, who seemed to find as much attraction in the vicinity of an old lady as in that of two wealthy and handsome young men.

'Good-night. I think, when we know each other better, we shall be very good friends,' she said to Jeanne, rather to the latter's wonderment, after Barrington and Leigh had taken their departure, and the usual ceremony of family prayers had been gone through, and Mr. Ashley was yawning loudly.

It was thus that Jeanne gained a friend who was destined to exercise some little influence upon the future course of her life. Miss Barrington plumed herself upon being a woman of the world. In her youth she had been a beauty; afterwards, when her good looks had faded away, she had become an heiress; and she had seen a great deal of men and women, and had long

since, so she said, discovered what the human race was worth. She did not expect much of her fellow-creatures, she would often aver—certainly nothing resembling chivalry or heroism—no, nor even common honesty. In reality, however, she was far from holding the opinions she laid claim to, but was a shrewd, kind-hearted, impulsive old soul, who was often swindled and often deceived, who was full of strong likings and antipathies, who was prone to form sudden prejudices and fancies, and tenacious of them when formed. She had taken a fancy now to this beautiful, stately French girl, and thenceforth she seized every opportunity of drawing her out and endeavouring to discover her tastes and habits.

Jeanne, for her part, was always willing to spend half-an-hour or so in listening to the chat of the old lady, whom she liked because she was so quaint, so original and plain-spoken, so very unlike the Ashleys. Or was it, perhaps, in some degree because her name was Barrington, and because she was the aunt of her nephew ?

CHAPTER XXXI.

JEANNE IS SHOWN THE SCENERY OF SURREY.

IF everyone were compelled, by some irresistible force, to state what had been the happiest period of his or her life, what odd, pathetic revelations would be made, and what unlooked-for confirmation certain threadbare truisms would receive ! For, indeed, what all say, and few believe, is, after all, the truth—that happiness is no more to be commanded than success ; that neither health, wealth, rank, nor glory can bestow it ; and that he who sets it before himself as his chief object in life is absolutely certain to miss his end.

Now it came to pass that, in the month of December 1870, our heroine, in whose character selfishness was assuredly no prominent trait, was blessed with two weeks during which all things seemed to go well with her. It is true that what cause she had had for trouble and anxiety remained to her still, for did not every hour bring her nearer to the time when Saint-Luc should come riding back from the wars to claim his bride ? And was not Léon, in these same wintry days, campaigning in the chill Loiret country, at the mercy of wind and weather.

and of any stray German bullet? But just then Jeanne was enabled to set aside these dismal thoughts and forebodings; and if anyone thinks that such capacity showed any want of feeling on her part, it is clear that that person was never in love, and can, therefore, be no fit judge of her case.

The chestnut mare, having been duly tried and found tractable, was sent up to the Holmhurst stables for Mademoiselle de Mersac's temporary use. Jeanne demurred at first to this arrangement, but gave way when Mr. Ashley, whose heart had been completely won by the skill of this beautiful young horse-breaker, swore that, unless she did so, he would buy the mare himself of Barrington and offer her to his niece as a Christmas present. Mrs. Ashley, good, imprudent soul, aided and abetted.

'By all means use the horse, my dear child,' said she. 'My girls would in a moment, only unfortunately they have no nerve; and Mr. Barrington has more horses and more money than he knows what to do with; and a good gallop will bring the roses into your cheeks, which, I'm sure, they want—not that your complexion isn't lovely, but just a tinge of colour, you know, is an improvement to everybody. And as to hunting, I can't see myself any reason why you shouldn't, except that gentlemen never do *really* like ladies in the hunting-field, whatever they may say; but at any rate you might ride to the meet, and Simpson could bring you home, if you didn't mind; and really it would be the greatest comfort to us all to think that there was some amusement for you here, unless, of course, M. de Saint-Luc had any objection to your riding.'

'I do not consult M. de Saint-Luc about such things,' said Jeanne, with much dignity. And so the matter was settled.

About this time two phenomena began to be a good deal commented upon by the subscribers to the Surrey hunt. One of these was the frequent appearance at the meets of a beautiful Frenchwoman—a niece of old Ashley's, of Holmhurst, people said—who sat her horse like an Amazon, but never followed the hounds; and the other was the curiously unsportsmanlike conduct of the master of Broadridge. Barrington, whose boast it had ever been that he did nothing by halves, had earned and sustained a good reputation in the hunting-field. Admirably mounted—as a bachelor of his means could well afford to be—riding at once judiciously and boldly, and knowing every inch of the country, it had hitherto been a tolerable certainty that, so long as the hounds were out, he would be with them. But

now he seemed to have determined that under no circumstances would he see the end of a run. He seldom missed a meet, it is true; but, whatever may have been the object of his attendance, it was apparently not to pursue the fox that he went out. If perchance a cover were drawn blank, that was quite enough for him; and often he would not even wait long enough to make sure of such a disappointment, but, after a brief interval of impatient fidgeting, would remark to anyone who happened to be near that this kind of thing really wasn't good enough, you know, and that he was going home. Nay, more than once, after getting off well, he was thrown out in the most unaccountable manner, and disappeared, no one knew whither.

Jeanne could have told them what became of the renegade sportsman on these occasions; and so, for that matter, could Simpson, had he been garrulously given. But Simpson was getting into years, and had learnt to hold his tongue, and, according to his own words, to 'keep hisself to hisself.'

Simpson, however, knew all about it. He knew perfectly well, as he shogged slowly along the miry lanes astride one of the carriage-horses, who would presently come thundering up from behind him, or pop over a hedge at his side, and say, with the utmost consideration, 'Oh, Simpson, hadn't you better be pushing on towards home? Mrs. Ashley will be wanting you this afternoon, you know, and I will see that the young lady gets back all right. Oh, and Simpson, here's——' And then this corrupt old groom would stretch out his right hand for a moment, withdraw it again, raise it to his hat, with a brisk 'Thank ye, sir,' and touch his horse with the spur.

He did not chatter about these things when he got back to the stables. He was not the man to judge his betters, or to jump to hasty conclusions because Mr. Barrington and Mamzell chose to ride about the country together for a couple of hours or more instead of returning direct to Holmhurst. For aught he knew, such ways of going on might be customary in France. And, in the meantime, he was a married man, with a young family, and half-sovereigns were half-sovereigns.

Long afterwards, when Barrington, in confidential intercourse, used to allude to these protracted rides, he was wont to declare that not once, in the course of any of them, had a word passed between him and Mademoiselle de Mersac which might not have been safely uttered in the presence of a third person. Indeed, Jeanne would not, at this time, have permitted her companion to address her as he had once done, in the days of

her freedom, in Algiers. But words, which are at best but a poor and inadequate means of expressing thought, may be replaced, as everybody knows, in many effectual ways; and probably those brief December days brought to our two friends as perfect a mutual understanding as they were likely ever to arrive at in this world.

They did not trouble the high road much. Sometimes they rode through winding byways and drowsy little villages; sometimes past farm-houses, where the sound of approaching hoofs set the dogs barking and frightened the ducks and geese from their stagnant pool; sometimes across a ploughed field or a stretch of pasture land. But most of all they liked to breast the steep sides of the chalk hills, and, after a short breathing-space upon the summit, to gallop over the free and rolling downs. Barrington, in his double capacity of an Englishman and a native of Surrey, was very properly anxious to point out the beauties of the wintry landscape to one who otherwise might possibly have failed to appreciate them. The ever-varying nature of the prospect was what he chiefly insisted upon. The attractiveness of scenery, he said, was, after all, almost entirely a question of atmosphere. It was not mere outline, however exquisite, that could satisfy the eye, but light and shade, or, to speak more correctly, gradations of colour; and the more these shifted and changed, the greater must be the charm of the natural picture; so that, although Surrey had not the grandeur of Algeria, and the English sun was but a poor imitation of the African, yet the wild, rainy winter of these Northern latitudes could produce effects unknown in brighter climes; and whether a blustering sou'-wester swept the bare downs under a low, grey sky, or whether there were a touch of frost in the air, and the blue smoke rose straight above the distant homesteads, or whether all the view were softened by a pearly mist, through which pale rays of sunlight struggled here and there, still there was always something in the aspect of this pastoral country to stir the artist's heart, and, almost every day, something fresh.

Barrington discoursed at considerable length in this strain, and said many foolish and affected things, and, every now and then, a true one. If it had pleased him to enlarge upon the origin of species or the meaning of existence, the effect produced upon the mind of his auditor would have been very nearly the same. It was not so much what Barrington said as the sound of his voice that she loved to listen to; and doubtless he might

have uttered ten times the number of absurdities that he did without any risk of her thinking him less witty and wise. Jeanne was at this time as nearly happy as it was possible for her to be. She was constantly alone with the man whom she loved; and that was enough for her. Whether he loved her was a question which she had not put to herself since the renewal of her intimacy with him—or, at all events, had not consciously put. Neither had her thoughts reverted to the dream she had once cherished of passing the remainder of her life with him. Her destiny was to marry M. de Saint-Luc, while his might very likely lead him into a union with Helen Ashley, a person entirely unworthy of him. But what was the use of dwelling upon the dark future? Jeanne rejoiced in the present, and troubled herself very little, it is to be feared, about its ultimate issues, whether as regarded herself or others. That she ought to have so troubled herself is not to be denied; but her biographer would humbly submit that he has not intended to represent Mademoiselle de Mersac as a type of feminine perfection.

As for Barrington, his character must indeed have been imperfectly indicated if it be not at once perceived what influence this sort of quasi-friendly intercourse was likely to have upon him. So long as the surface of life was made smooth and easy for this philosopher, he was not the man to search for any germs of possible sorrow that might lie beneath it. He was deeply in love with Jeanne; he luxuriated in the hints and insinuations of his love which opportunity enabled him to indulge in; he had just enough doubt as to her sentiments with regard to him to add zest to his philandering; and as for that determination of making her his wife which he had announced so firmly to his friend Leigh, that might conveniently be put upon the shelf for a season.

And if some extenuation be required for the thoughtless conduct of these two persons, it may perhaps be found in the fact that those about them threw no sort of obstacle in their path. A matter had to be thrust very close under Mrs. Ashley's nose before she would become aware of it; Mr. Ashley had long since made up his mind, in a dull, vague way, that Barrington was eventually to marry his eldest daughter, and had no fears upon the score of this French niece, who was already engaged to some foreigner or other; and Miss Barrington, who alone saw whither the course of events was tending, had reasons of her own for not choosing to interfere with it. Even Helen,

though she was a trifle dissatisfied and jealous, felt no serious alarm; for she had that curiously infatuated belief in the power of her own charms which would appear to be the especial property of fair-haired, lymphatic women.

So it was that Barrington was allowed to ride about the country with Jeanne all day, and to spend nearly every evening at Holmhurst, without let or hindrance.

Now, there lived in the neighbourhood a certain big personage, whose name is of no importance to our story, but who, in the lack of a better pseudonym, may be called the Marquis of Carabas; and this nobleman, residing but little upon his Surrey estates, yet anxious, for political and other reasons, to keep on good terms with the landed gentry of the county, great and small, was accustomed, in the month of December, every year, to give a ball, to which, with a large-hearted hospitality, it was his rule to invite the whole of them. To Helen and Blanche Ashley this annual festivity was as important an event as the Derby is to some people and Easter Monday to others. By ancient and prescriptive right they each received a present of a ball-dress from their father as the time for the event drew near. They talked of it for weeks beforehand, and wondered who would be there with as much eagerness as if there had been the slightest doubt as to the number and names of the guests whom they were to meet. And now nothing would satisfy them but that Jeanne must see to what a pitch of elegance and luxury the Surrey entertainments were capable of reaching.

‘You needn’t hesitate on account of its making an extra lady,’ Blanche urged, ‘because there is always such a crowd that one more or less cannot possibly make any difference; and Lady Carabas is so good-natured and kind. Mamma met her in Westerham the other day, and she said we were to be sure to bring anybody who might be staying in the house. Do come.’

‘Come!’ cried Mrs. Ashley. ‘Of course she will come. Why should she not? If it is about your being in mourning that you are thinking, my dear, that is of no consequence at all; it is not the custom in England for people to shut themselves up on that account. There were two girls who lived in this neighbourhood—I can’t recollect their names just now, but everybody knew them—and their father fell downstairs one evening and broke his neck—such a shocking thing! I always think it is so dreadful for people to meet their death in that kind of ridiculous manner, because one can’t help laughing a little at it, and yet it is quite as bad for them and their relations, you

know, as if they had died in their beds, in the ordinary way—not but what it was just as well in this particular case, for I believe the poor man drank terribly, and they said he used to beat his wife. Well, I remember perfectly that, about six weeks, or perhaps it may have been two months afterwards, a charity ball was given at Reigate, and there were those girls, smothered in black crape, but in low dresses—striking, still very becoming to them, I must say, for they had clear white skins, something like yours, my dear; and they made quite a sensation, and a great many people were scandalised, and one of them married an enormously rich man—a timber merchant, or something—immediately afterwards. It *was* a little soon certainly—the ball I mean, not the marriage—but I mention it just to show you that you need not feel any scruple.’

Jeanne explained that, if she declined to be present at the Marchioness of Carabas’s ball, it would not be owing to any apprehension of the kind suggested.

‘Then you really must come,’ said Blanche. And Barrington, who happened to be present, took occasion to add that the whole county would consider itself slighted if Mademoiselle de Mersac refused to countenance its small attempts at gaiety.

‘That is very great nonsense,’ returned Jeanne, all her old dislike for laboured compliments aroused by this absurd assertion. ‘I know no one in the county, and no one can miss me if I stay away; but if my friends in Algiers heard that I had gone to a ball at such a time as this, when all our country is in mourning, they would be very angry. And they would be quite right to be angry.’

In truth, things were not looking hopeful for France in those dark December days. The army of the Loire, under General Chanzy, slowly retreating; Ducrot forced back into Paris, neither dead nor victorious; the Government removed to Bordeaux, and King William fitting on his Imperial crown in the palace of Louis XIV.—how could any Frenchwoman be expected to dance in the midst of such troubles?

‘I will stay at home with Miss Barrington, and you shall tell me all about the ball the next morning,’ said Jeanne. And Miss Barrington nodded her head approvingly.

‘You and Mademoiselle de Mersac will be rather dull all by yourselves, Aunt Susan,’ remarked Barrington. ‘I’ve a great mind to cut the ball myself, and to come in and spend the evening with you.’

‘You will do nothing of the sort,’ returned his aunt, some-

what sharply. 'The county really would think itself slighted by your absence—or at any rate, you believe it would; and you are much too considerate to inflict unnecessary pain upon others. Besides which, you would only interrupt our chat and be in the way here.'

'Thank you very much. I always take it as a compliment when people tell me they don't want me. It isn't the sort of thing that one could say to most men, don't you see, without being misunderstood.'

'You have that happy self-conceit, Harry,' replied Miss Barrington, 'that I believe you would discover some subtle form of flattery in being called a fool. But you certainly do not misunderstand me in the present instance. When I tell you that your room will be preferred to your company on the 18th, I mean what I say.'

And so she did. It was her rule to state her wishes in plain terms. She wished, just then, to have a few words with Jeanne; and she knew that this end could hardly be attained so long as her nephew was in the room. When the evening of the ball came, and when, after some delay in the completion of the young ladies' toilettes and a good deal of fidgeting and grumbling on the part of Mr. Ashley, the whole party had at last driven away, she drew a long breath of satisfaction, and, pulling her arm chair up to the fireside, motioned to Jeanne to do likewise.

'Now,' said she, 'we can talk in peace. Tell me, what do you think of these good people?'

Jeanne was by this time quite accustomed to the old lady's abrupt and rather indiscreet questions. She laughed, and said that everybody in the house had been very kind to her.

'Oh, yes, they are very kind in their way. I don't want to eat their salt and then speak against them behind their backs, you know. But it is quite possible to be kind, amiable, tolerably well-educated, and hospitable, and at the same time to be a great bore; and I confess that these dear Ashleys bore me. On the other hand, I am such a bore to them that you may be sure they would not have pressed me to stay six weeks in their house if they had not expected to profit by it, sooner or later. Do you know how many god-children I have?'

Jeanne said 'No.'

'Six-and-twenty—no less than that. They are all of tender years. I never was asked to stand sponsor to a single infant till I was past middle age, and independent, and likely to re-

main so. Odd, isn't it? Now, do you think—I ask you as a friend, you know, and an impartial judge—*do* you think that Helen would make a suitable wife for Harry?’

Jeanne was not likely to be disconcerted by thrusts of this nature. ‘I suppose,’ said she, ‘that Mr. Barrington will choose his wife for himself.’

‘Not he! You don't know him, or you would not say that. Two months ago I could have got him to engage himself to Helen Ashley with the greatest ease in the world. In point of fact, I very nearly did it. But one changes one's views very often—at least, I do, I am sorry to say—and now I begin to think that, after all, Helen would hardly do. I regret it, because there certainly was a sort of tacit understanding between me and the Ashleys that the match should be made; but there—the world is full of disappointments, and they must take their share like the rest of us. I shall give Helen a couple of dresses and a fifty-pound note, and put her down for a trifle more in my will. I think that will be behaving handsomely. The only difficulty is to find a substitute for her.’

‘But is it necessary that Mr. Barrington should marry at all?’ asked Jeanne, rather amused at the off-hand way in which her friend's future was being mapped out for him.

‘That is not the question. He is quite sure to marry, and that before he is much older too. And I think he has taken up a mistaken notion of the whole subject, as men often do. And the truth is, I am fond of Harry—he has been something more than a nephew to me—and I don't want him to make his life miserable by a stupid error.’

Jeanne said nothing, but wondered inwardly what might be the mistaken notion that Mr. Barrington had adopted.

‘Marriages,’ resumed Miss Barrington, after a long pause, are mostly mistakes. I daresay you may think that, as an old maid, I am not very competent to judge; but lookers-on see most of the game, and I know what a mess a great many of my friends have made of it. Sometimes I think that they manage these things better in Chicago, though no doubt that system also has its disadvantages. Anyhow, in this country, a husband and wife can't dissolve their partnership because they don't happen to agree; and, do you know, the longer I live, the more I become convinced that there can be no real happiness in married life without love. That is an old-fashioned idea, I am aware; but I make bold to maintain the truth of it, all the same, and in the face of the fact that a great many men, and

nearly all women, think differently—at all events, *before marriage.*'

'We think differently in France,' Jeanne observed.

'Yes; and look at the result! Not, of course, that you can know anything about that. You *will* know though, one of these days, if you don't mind what you are about. Now, don't look offended, my dear girl, because I am a blunt old woman, and I shall say what I please, when I think it is for your good. Take my word for it, you had better get rid of M. de Saint-Luc while you can. Harry has told me all about him.'

'I would rather discuss Mr. Barrington's marriage than my own,' said Jeanne.

'I don't see any reason why we should not discuss both; but no matter—yours can stand over for the present. I want to find Harry a wife whom he can love, who will love him in return, and who will have enough tact and self-respect to prevent him from tiring of her in six months. If you should ever come across such a person, it would be a friendly act on your part to beg her to put herself in communication with me. I am going away the day after to-morrow.'

'So soon!' ejaculated Jeanne, her breath rather taken away by the suddenness with which this intended move was announced.

'Yes. I have had enough, and more than enough, of Holmhurst for the present; and really it is time for me to visit another of my twenty-six god-children. After the new year, I shall go to my own house in London; and then I want you to come and stay with me. Will you come?'

'I should like it very much,' answered Jeanne, rather hesitatingly; 'that is, if my uncle and aunt have no objection.'

'Good gracious me! what objection could they have? I should like to hear them object to anything that I proposed! You need not be afraid of finding London dull. I see a good many people of one kind and another, and you will not be left very much alone with me. I shouldn't wonder if Harry were to come up to town in January. I know he means to leave this before Christmas. Well, then, that is all settled. And now I am going off to bed.'

Miss Barrington accordingly collected her work, her spectacles, the book that she was reading, and her other belongings, and departed. But Jeanne sat staring into the fire, thinking, wondering, and doubting within herself, until at length the re-

vellers returned from their ball, the 'elders yawning, but the young people still excited and voluble.

Helen was in the best of tempers and spirits. She had, it appeared, achieved a signal success. Her card had been filled up within five minutes of her entrance into the ball-room ; old Lord Carabas had trotted up to her and complimented her upon her blooming complexion. 'Rather impertinent of him, wasn't it? But I suppose one ought not to mind that kind of thing from an old gentleman,' said the pleased Helen. Mr. Barrington had made himself especially agreeable, and she had danced with him three times—oh, no, not five times, Blanche—certainly not—well, perhaps it might have been four. And so forth, and so forth.

The retrospect lasted a good half-hour ; and at the end of it Jeanne, seeking the solitude of her own room, sat down to think over the events of the evening, and to wonder what the end of all this would be. For her, if for no one else, she was beginning to perceive that there was every appearance, at present, of troubles ahead.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN WHICH BARRINGTON DOES A GREAT DEAL OF TALKING.

MISS BARRINGTON proved as good as her word. Two days after the ball she bade a cordial farewell to her friends at Holmhurst, and drove away from the door, her prim, elderly maid facing her on the back seat of the carriage, and her neat luggage following in a cart, under the charge of two servants. The number of hitherto invisible retainers who started up to render Miss Barrington some small service, on the last day of her sojourn in any country-house, was something astonishing ; but she did not object to the practice, and, indeed, had done something to encourage it, holding, as she did, that one of the few unmixed delights that accrue to the possessor of a full purse is that of indiscriminate tipping.

The Ashleys, one and all, bemoaned her departure loudly ; and a perceptible gloom fell upon the household after she had gone. But was this owing solely to grief over the loss of their guest, or had her casual remark that she expected Mademoiselle

de Mersac to pay her a visit, early in the ensuing month, anything to do with it? It is a fact that Helen had been given to suppose that she, and not her cousin, was to have been thus favoured; and if this unexpected change of programme produced some feeling of soreness and disappointment in her breast, and a little anxiety in that of her parents, who can blame them?

It must, at all events, be recorded to their credit that they vented none of the ill-humour they may have felt upon Jeanne, but were only a trifle silent and dispirited during the remainder of the day. Miss Barrington, as they all knew, was a capricious old person, liable to all kinds of passing fancies, which those who valued her friendship must needs put up with. It was certainly not a little vexatious that she should have chosen to defraud Helen of her visit to London, but that she might be contemplating the far more serious injury of robbing her of her potential husband was a notion that had not as yet suggested itself to any one of them.

And to Helen, at any rate, joy came in the morning. For upon her plate at breakfast-time she found a very kind note from her god-mother, enclosing a cheque for fifty pounds, and at the same time requesting her to order for herself, by way of a Christmas present, two dresses, with regard to the materials and trimmings of which no restriction was laid upon her. The same post brought a little pile of foreign letters to Jeanne, two of which were evidently from M. de Fontvieille and from her brother's bailiff respectively.

Pierre Cauvin's composition was in the highest degree creditable to him. The style of it was ornate, the orthography ingenious if somewhat peculiar, and the absence of erasures testified that the whole production was probably the result of more than one rough copy. He began by offering humble thanks to Providence for his continued preservation in good health, and likewise for that of all his subordinates, whom he made it a point to mention severally, so that the first page of his letter, with its long string of harshly sounding Arab names, read not unlike one of the genealogical chapters of the Old Testament. This duty accomplished, he went on to express a respectful hope that mademoiselle had not suffered from the effects of the bleak climate of the North. He had taken some pains, he said, since mademoiselle's departure, to discover whether the English winter were as formidable as it had been represented, and had gained a little reassuring information from

the captain of a yacht which had lately come into harbour. 'He is a native of Cahousses, in the island of Ouaïte,' wrote Pierre, 'which, according to him, is one of the British Isles, though I have not been able to discover it upon the map. He tells me that in his part of the country snow and frost are seldom seen, but I have remarked that the stories of sailors should be received with caution. This one would have me believe, for instance, that, during the summer months, there are often as many as a hundred yachts such as his master's—a vessel, mademoiselle, fitted up with inconceivable luxury—lying off the little town where he lives, and that this is but a small fraction of the number of pleasure-ships that carry the English flag. I answer him nothing; but mademoiselle is aware that an Auvergnat is not the man to let himself be taken in by an Englishman. I ask pardon of mademoiselle if I seem to speak disrespectfully of the nation to which madame her honoured mother belonged; but the truth is that *Messieurs les Anglais ne sont pas malins*'—(the phrase is hardly to be translated satisfactorily). 'We have but few of them here this winter, owing to the war; and the shopkeepers and landlords complain much of their absence. The country, mademoiselle, continues to rejoice in a profound tranquillity. The Arabs have not moved as yet; but one must not trust too much to them. The autumn rains have answered to our utmost hopes'—&c., &c., &c. At this point Pierre entered upon agricultural topics, and fell into a more vernacular strain of language.

M. de Fontvieille wrote somewhat despondently. He was very lonely, he said, very dull, and old age was gaining upon him every day. He had no longer the slightest hope of any successful termination to the war, and foresaw yet worse troubles looming on the horizon. Why he had been destined to live on into these bad times, after nearly all his contemporaries had been removed, was more than he could understand; and he should pray for the end, were it not that he longed to embrace his beloved children once more. He cheered up a little, however, on the last page, and related, with manifest glee, how he had purchased a magnificent pearl necklace from a distressed Moor, and with what crafty devices he had managed to get the better of that needy unbeliever.

And now Jeanne had to open her third letter, which she had reserved for the last, not upon the schoolboy's principle of pudding first and plums afterwards, but rather because she had feared that, had she read this letter before the others, the

remembrance of it would probably have entirely marred her enjoyment of them, for she had seen at once that it was from M. de Saint-Luc.

After all, it proved to be only a friendly, but formal reply to one which, in a fit of compunction, she had addressed to him soon after her arrival in England. It opened with 'Dear Mademoiselle,' and closed with an assurance of the writer's respectful homage; it contained little information of a personal kind, except the modest mention of a slight wound, already nearly healed, and a pardonable self-congratulation upon the conduct of the regiment, which was now serving under General Bourbaki; it dwelt at some length upon the gallantry and cheerful endurance displayed by Léon; it touched briefly upon the prospects of the campaign; and was, in short, as unlike the missive of a lover to his affianced bride as anything could well be. Nothing could have been more discreet, nothing less calculated to ruffle the susceptibilities of the lady to whom it was addressed; yet, in spite of its matter-of-fact tone—perhaps in consequence of it—it caused Jeanne to feel some sharp twinges of conscience.

It was not because her whole heart belonged to Barrington that she reproached herself: she had been quite clear in her mind, from the first, that nothing in the nature of love was due from her to M. de Saint-Luc. Nor did she deem herself much to blame in that she had left her future husband for so long without any direct news of her or inquiry after his safety. But what troubled her was an uneasy feeling that this man, whom she had always despised, was treating her with a generosity which she had certainly not deserved at his hands. Hitherto she had looked forward to her marriage simply and solely with reference to its bearing upon Léon's fortunes and her own. Of M. de Saint-Luc she had thought as little as a patient for whom leeches have been prescribed is apt to think of the suffering in store for those loathsome creatures, who, however, have obviously not altogether the best of it in the unpleasant business. To her he had been only a means—and a most distasteful means—towards an end. But now she began to wonder whether, after all, it were worthy of her, or even just, to regard him in this light. M. de Fontvieille and the Curé of El Biar had both given her to understand—though not, perhaps, in so many words—that it was permissible to marry one man and to love another; but when they had thus soothed her scruples, that other had been many hundred miles away

which certainly made a difference. Neither of them would have been likely to sanction those long rides of which mention has been made; even less would they have approved of the dialogues between their *protégée* and the Englishman, in which so little of importance was said and so much inferred. The truth was that Jeanne had, for some time, been unconsciously stifling a conviction that out of all this some issue must come; that she would scarcely be able to part from Barrington without some sort of mutual avowal; and Saint-Luc's letter was but a flash of additional light thrown suddenly upon the point from which she had, until now, sedulously averted her eyes. Not that she actually faced it even yet. She did not say to herself that Barrington loved her, or that he must have conjectured what her feelings were towards him. She did not dwell upon the thought that, if he and she were really all in all to one another, nothing—not even Léon's interests—ought to keep them apart. How could she, when the man whom she loved had as yet given her no right to do so? But, as the upshot of a good deal of confused and perplexed self-communing, she did determine that the chestnut mare should return forthwith to the Broadridge stables, where, if she had only known it, Barrington and Leigh were, at that very moment, deep in a conversation, in the course of which her name had recurred at tolerably frequent intervals.

The two friends had visited every stall and loose-box, had duly criticised the condition of their occupants, had seen some of the horses go out for exercise, and now Leigh had seated himself upon an upturned bucket before the stable-door, and was puffing at a short wooden pipe, while, with half-closed eyes and patient mien, he listened to a protracted discourse from his host, who was pacing to and fro as he talked, and pausing, every now and then, in front of his auditor, to emphasize a point or round a period.

‘I admit the justice of your arguments,’ the orator was saying; ‘I admit that there are serious objections to my marrying a lady who is not English by birth, and who will of course be, all her life, more or less under the influence of the priests. I don't mind going even further, and allowing that there are certain subjects upon which she and I might very possibly not find ourselves in complete sympathy. Moreover, I fully agree with you in thinking that such a girl as Helen Ashley is far better to become the wife of an English country gentleman than Mademoiselle de Mersac, and that, in the

matter of marriage, a wise man will pay more heed to the long years to come than to the passion of the present.'

'Didn't know I'd said all that,' remarked Leigh, parenthetically; 'but it sounds very sensible.'

'It is sensible, and therefore you said it. Or else you said it, and therefore it is sensible. A Yarmouth bloater is not more impregnated with salt than you are with common sense. You are the best of fellows, my dear old Leigh, but you are a Philistine of the Philistines.'

'Ah, I don't understand that kind of slang; but if a Philistine means a man who does his best to see facts as they are, instead of perpetually trying to mystify himself and everybody about him, I glory in being one.'

'Of course you do, and quite right too. I never said there weren't good points about a Philistine. We are what we are; we can't help our natures, and may as well be proud of our several excellences. I, for instance, am not commonplace, and I am glad of it. Jeanne is not commonplace; our intercourse has not been commonplace; and why, in Heaven's name, are we to hurry it into a commonplace ending?'

Leigh knocked out the ashes from his pipe against the heel of his boot, and looked up with an air of wearied toleration.

'If I can make out what you are driving at may I be—married myself!' he ejaculated. 'When you began to talk I certainly understood that what you were arguing to prove was that you would be doing a wise thing in marrying this French girl, though the rest of the world would probably think otherwise. Now, as far as I can see, you are protesting against such a "common-place" notion. But, if you don't intend marriage, what on earth *do* you intend? You say you are not going in for a mere flirtation; you are for ever swearing that you can't live without the girl; and yet, you know, you won't be able to go on galloping about the country with her and larking over fences till the end of your life, unless you get at least as far as an engagement. And in the meantime, as a matter of detail, she happens to be engaged to another fellow.'

Mr. Leigh stated the case quite correctly. His friend had, indeed, shifted his ground in the course of argument, as was habitual with him; but Barrington was not the man to be put out by any charge of inconsistency. He simply ignored it, and proceeded to follow out his train of thought.

'No doubt,' said he, 'we shall settle down, some day, as Mr. and Mrs. Barrington, and have people here to stay with us,

and ask the neighbours to dinner once a month, and go to church on Sundays—no, by-the-by, I suppose we shall not go to church together. All that will be very delightful, and I ask for nothing better; only don't you see that, when that time comes, there will be an end to the "schöne Liebeszeit?" Marriage, which to people of your stamp is the goal and crown of all love-making, is to me simply the death-blow of romance. Not of love, mind you—I don't say that—but unquestionably of one of the subtlest charms of love. Remove the element of uncertainty, and you enter upon an entirely new phase of the sentiment. I am uncertain now, and I rejoice in being so. Suppose I were to ask Jeanne point-blank to-day to be my wife, how do I know that she would not refuse me? How do I know that she would not consider herself bound in honour to this broken-down *viveur* whom her friends have driven her into accepting? And there again is another argument against hurry. It is quite even betting that M. de Saint-Luc gets knocked on the head before the war is over; and if that happy deliverance should come about, I could step into his place with much greater propriety and less fuss, don't you see? But the fact is, Leigh, that you and I should never see these questions in the same light if we were to talk till Doomsday. Your idea of happiness is a bachelor life. Failing that, you would like to get your courtship over as quickly as possible, and take a fresh start as a pattern husband and father. Your ideal world is a pleasant, fertile valley, neatly marked out into pastures and ploughed fields, with flocks and herds and crops in due season. You would be quite content to plod along it, in a steady, equable way, for the remainder of your days; and all the time you would be so engrossed in watching your prosperity increase, and your children growing up like what's his-names about your table, that you would never once raise your eyes to the measureless blue overhead where the skylarks are trilling, or to the heights where, far removed from the confused chatter, and oaths, and groans, and laughter of men, the snowy summits sleep on, in calm beauty and grandeur, from century to century.'

'The right honourable gentleman resumed his seat amidst prolonged cheering, and the proceedings, which had lasted up to an advanced hour, then terminated.'

That was all the response that Barrington got from his confidant, who now rose, and sauntered away towards the house. But when he had gone some ten paces on his way, he faced about, and called out—

‘I say, are you really off the day after to-morrow?’

‘Yes; I believe so.’

‘Oh! Well, it’s no business of mine, and I don’t suppose for a moment that you will be guided by me; but, if I were you, I would have something settled definitely, one way or the other, before I went.’ And, with these parting words of advice, Mr. Leigh vanished.

As for Barrington, he shrugged his shoulders with a slight deprecating smile, as who should say, ‘What else could you expect? Does a thorn bear grapes, or a thistle figs?’—and shortly afterwards, mounting his horse, rode across the park towards Holmhurst.

He congratulated himself upon his good fortune when he found Jeanne alone in the library; but the manner of his reception was scarcely what he had anticipated. Jeanne was feeling a little nervous and disturbed in mind; and when Mr. Barrington was announced, wished, perhaps for the first time in her life, that he were away. But as there was no getting rid of his physical presence, she set herself to put him at a moral distance—a task never very difficult to her. She laid aside the half-written letter upon which she had been engaged, rose, shook hands, and resumed her seat with a certain chilly dignity of demeanour which had often damped Barrington’s spirits before now. He did not, however, choose to notice it, but drew a chair up beside hers, and remarked that it was a beautiful day, and that he hoped she was coming out for a ride. She said no; she did not think she would be able to ride that day.

‘What a bore!’ exclaimed Barrington. ‘I did hope we should have managed a ride this afternoon, because I don’t know when our next one will be. To-morrow I am obliged to do a little justicing, and the day after I have got to go away on a long-promised visit to some friends.’

‘Your aunt told me you would be going away soon,’ Jeanne observed.

‘Yes. I wish to goodness I wasn’t; but I can’t get out of it now, I’m afraid. We shall meet again though, before very long, I hope.’

To this no reply was forthcoming.

‘You *are* going to stay with my aunt in January, are you not?’ Barrington asked, rather anxiously.

‘Perhaps. I have not thought much about it yet. I suppose your friend Mr. Leigh goes away too?’

‘Leigh? Oh, yes, he goes, of course. It is a great nuisance. I wish I had not engaged myself to these people.’

'Oh, you are sure to enjoy yourself when once you are away,' said Jeanne. 'But we shall all miss you both,' she added politely.

Barrington grunted. 'I don't care about being missed in that collective sort of way,' he said. After which there was silence for a few moments.

'You will give Zephyr a gallop every day I hope,' resumed Barrington, presently. Zephyr was the name of the chestnut mare.

'I think not. I made up my mind this morning, before you came, that I would not ride any more.'

Was Barrington very much to be blamed if he fancied that his approaching departure might have something to do with this resolution?

'Riding all by oneself is dull work, certainly,' he said, while a satisfied smile, which he could not altogether repress, gathered about the corners of his mouth.

'I like riding alone,' answered Jeanne. 'I have been accustomed to be left to myself all my life, and I often think it is much pleasanter not to be obliged to talk to somebody. But, for several reasons, I do not wish to use your horse any longer. You have been very kind to allow me to keep her all this time.'

'Might one venture to ask your reasons?' Barrington inquired.

'Well, one of them is that I am afraid I have not been enough with my cousins lately. They must have thought it rather rude in me to leave them as I have done. And, besides, I am sure it is not right to make use of another person's horse as if it were one's own. What should I do if any accident happened?'

Barrington protested that he had not the slightest fear of any harm coming to his property while under such skilled guidance as that of Mademoiselle de Mersac; and moreover that the safety of Zephyr was a matter of complete indifference to him, so long as that of her rider was not endangered, and a good deal more to the same effect; but Jeanne was not to be shaken, and at last closed the discussion by a decisive, 'I am very much obliged to you, but I do not intend to ride Zephyr again.'

'You are not yourself this morning,' said Barrington, abruptly. 'Is anything the matter?'

'No. At least nothing particular. It is only that I have had letters from France.'

‘No bad news of your brother, I trust. Was your letter from him?’

‘No; it was from—somebody else.’ (M. de Saint-Luc’s name had not once been mentioned between these two people since the day of their first meeting in Broadridge Park.) ‘But Léon is quite well, I am thankful to say. It is not that.’

‘I suppose it is about somebody else’s safety, then, that you feel anxious,’ suggested Barrington, in a somewhat altered voice.

‘I am not anxious at all,’ answered Jeanne; ‘not more so, that is, than I have been ever since Léon left me; only I feel that I have been enjoying myself too much. I cannot exactly explain what I mean; but you would understand if you were in my place. One does not really forget,’ she continued, speaking more to herself than to her listener. ‘One’s heart does not ache the less because one talks and laughs like other people; but yet it seems a shameful thing, and almost a treachery to the absent, that one should be pleased and amused so easily. How terrible it is to think that, at this very moment, Léon may be lying wounded with nobody to take care of him! And M. de Saint-Luc too,’ she added, with a visible effort.

Barrington was not in the least jealous. That quick sympathy and profound acquaintance with human nature which he especially prided himself upon enabled him to surmise, without any difficulty, what Jeanne’s present frame of mind was, and what had led her into it. She had a tender conscience and a keen sense of duty, he thought; and for these fine qualities he magnanimously admired her the more. Still it would not do to let her fall under the sway of an exaggerated self-distrust.

‘Oh, but you must not torment yourself in that manner,’ said he, cheerfully; ‘because that is quite a wrong way of looking at things. If you were to shut yourself up in your room all day, and speak to nobody, who would be the better for it? Do you think it would increase your brother’s happiness to know that you were making yourself miserable? Or do you suppose him so silly as to imagine that you do not care for him, because you can still enjoy a gallop in the fresh air? It would be as reasonable to say that there was treachery in admiring a beautiful sunset—or music—or pictures.’

But Jeanne shook her head. ‘It is useless to make excuses like that,’ she sighed, a little impatiently. ‘I am sure it has been all wrong from beginning to end. I wish, I *wish* they had let me stay at home in Algiers!’

'I am sorry you wish that,' said Barrington, in a low voice. 'Though perhaps,' he added presently, 'I have more reason to wish it than you.'

He glanced up as he spoke, and found Jeanne's great, serious eyes turned full upon him. And then there passed between them a long look—one of those looks which it is so exceedingly reprehensible for a young man to indulge in, seeing that he may thus acquire knowledge to which he has no fair right without committing himself to words.

It was not the first time that Barrington had thus interrogated Jeanne's eyes; and now, perhaps, they could tell him little that he did not already know. Once before, it may be remembered, he had found himself in a somewhat similar situation, and had lost his head, and said something—he hardly remembered what. And then Madame de Breuil had come in, leaning on her stick, and had brought him to his senses in a trice. No such calming apparition was required to keep his lips closed upon the present occasion. To give Barrington his due, it was not out of prudence, nor from any misgivings as to the strength of his purpose, that he remained silent, but in part owing to the motives which he had avowed to Leigh earlier in the day, and in a still greater degree, because he was really uncertain how Jeanne, in her present temper, would be likely to receive an open declaration of love. It was quite within the limits of possibility that she might take it as an insult. He looked volumes therefore, and said nothing; and presently Mademoiselle de Mersac herself dispelled the tension of the moment in the most unromantic manner in the world. She called Turco, who, all this time, had been sleeping peacefully under the table; and, as the huge brute came out, stretching himself and wagging his tail lazily—'He has got something wrong with his ear,' said she. 'I wish you would look at it, and tell me what you think is the matter.'

After that, there was no further danger of a distressing scene. Who could revert to heroics after reporting upon the condition of a dog's ear? Barrington, half-relieved, half-vexed, went down upon his knees, made the necessary investigations, delivered his opinion, and was about to sit down again, when the Miss Ashleys came in, rosy and radiant, from their morning walk, and cordially begged him to stay to luncheon.

He spent another two hours, or more, in the house, but he was not permitted to be alone again with Jeanne. He bade

her good-bye in the presence of the whole Ashley family, and, with their eyes upon him, did not dare to say more than—

‘It is not good-bye for long, though, I hope. If I am not back here in the course of a week or two, we shall be sure, at least, to meet in London.’

To which Jeanne, with a perfectly unmoved countenance, responded, ‘I hope we may—if I go there.’

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ON THE MARCH.

BARRINGTON was so accustomed to being missed whenever he went away, and he himself regretted so much the necessity of leaving home just now, that he almost apologised to his friends at Holmhurst as he shook hands with them all, and bade them farewell for a time. But in truth the loss of his society afflicted nobody very greatly at this especial juncture. Jeanne was thankful to be relieved from a position of which the falseness had at last fully dawned upon her; Mr. and Mrs. Ashley were beginning to suspect that their daughter's nose had been a little put out of joint of late by her magnificent cousin; and Helen herself, having no doubt whatever upon this point, hailed the change with positive joy. Moreover, Christmas was at hand; and that alone was sufficient to keep the thoughts and the fingers of the whole family occupied.

Everybody above the age of eighteen hates Christmas, and nowadays everybody says so; but Holmhurst was in all things some twenty or thirty years behind time, and to have suggested in that house that the last week of December and the first of January were not the two merriest of the whole twelvemonth, would have been almost tantamount to a confession of atheism. The jollity of the season, so far as the actual members of the household were concerned, took, it must be confessed, a somewhat heavy and substantial form; still, such as it was, they welcomed it for old associations' sake, and if it brought them no other blessing, the preparations for it provided them at least with plenty of work. There were blankets to be counted, flannel petticoats to be made, and toys to be selected for the school-children's Christmas-tree, not to speak of the church

decorations, which were always elaborate, and which the rector's wife, being fat and lazy, gladly handed over to the care of 'those dear, good Ashley girls.' And besides all this, every room in the house had to be got ready for the annual visit of certain uncles, aunts, and cousins, some of whom were asked because they were well-to-do, and others because they were conspicuously the reverse; for Mr. Ashley prided himself upon observing all the old traditions of Christmas, even down to the entertaining of poor relations. Jeanne helped with the flannel petticoats, and earned some praise by her neat and speedy workmanship.

'I learnt to sew quickly during the summer,' she explained, in answer to some expressions of surprise from her cousins. 'We had a great deal of work to do for the wounded, and there was not always much time to spare.'

'If I had a brother, or a—or anybody I cared a great deal for at the war,' said Helen, 'I should go off to France at once as a nurse, so as to be ready to take care of him when he was wounded.'

'Perhaps he wouldn't be wounded,' remarked Jeanne.

'Oh, he would be sure to be, sooner or later. At least, I don't mean that—only I should like to be there in case, you know.'

'One must learn nursing before one can be of any use.'

'And Helen always turns faint at the sight of blood,' put in Blanche. 'The other day a man in the village got dreadfully hurt by a threshing machine, and of course they insisted upon our seeing him, as people in that rank of life always do; and Helen pushed me into the room first, and stood close behind me with her eyes shut the whole time—you know you did, Helen.'

'I don't enjoy looking at horrid things,' confessed Helen; 'but of course I could do it if it were really necessary.'

'I suppose we can all do what we are obliged to do,' observed Jeanne. 'One says things are impossible; but they have to be done, and somehow they *are* done. This time last year I should have thought it quite impossible to live as I am doing now, knowing that Léon is in constant danger, and not even having a letter from him for weeks; and yet here I am, you see, and I can eat and sleep easily enough, and help you to make petticoats.'

'Yes, and flirt with young men, who by rights should belong to others, too,' poor Helen may have thought; but she only said, 'You must often be anxious in this bitter weather.'

‘I try not to think about it; it is no use imagining things. When I heard last, they were at Bourges, where at least they would have four walls and a roof to protect them. I try to hope they are there still.’

It was as well that she could not see her brother at that particular moment. Had she been able to do so, there would have been an end of her petticoat-making for the rest of the afternoon; for in truth she had never let her mind dwell much upon the details of campaigning, and could hardly have borne to think of Léon as actually suffering from cold or hunger. The reader, however, being presumably more callous, will hardly object to turn away for a time from our heroine, as she sits before the fire with her needlework in her hand, her cousins’ unending chatter in her ears, and her own thoughts in her mind, and to pay a flying visit to two other personages of the story, who had been out of sight for some months, and whom he will find working out their destiny under much less comfortable circumstances.

Far south of Holmburst, in wealthy, grape-bearing Burgundy, the scene, in these last days of 1870, is as wintry as a Siberian view and as cheerless as the prospects of France. Hill and valley, field and vineyard, lie buried beneath the snow. From the sky, leaden overhead, but growing inky towards the horizon, a few flakes are still falling, driven before a moaning wind which raises eddying white columns from the ground as it sweeps on, and lays bare the boughs of the sparse trees. Across this melancholy landscape an enormous railway-train, composed almost entirely of cattle-trucks and vans, and dragged by two puffing engines, is slowly, very slowly, making its way. Gradually it slackens speed, while the leading engine sends forth a prolonged whistle—for the signals of a wayside station have just come in sight—and soon it comes to a standstill altogether. The loosely coupled trucks bump one against the other; the hiss of the escaping steam dies away; the engines join in one last discordant shriek; and then all is still. But ere long a murmur of growls and maledictions begins to make itself heard. ‘Accursed railways of the devil! here is the tenth stoppage in the course of fifteen miles. If they can’t advance, why don’t they let us get out and march!’—‘*Nom de Dieu!* is it worth while to bring a man all the way from Perpignan to freeze to death in a horse-box? They would have done better to shoot us all at home; it would have been sooner over and have cost less.’—‘Ah, when I told you that these station-masters have all

come to a good understanding with the Prussians! It is to give their dear friends time to retreat at their ease that they keep us here starving of hunger and cold.' Lean, dirty faces peer out through the unglazed apertures which do duty for windows; hoarse grumblings grow louder and louder. 'Go on then—never mind the signals!'—'Are we to stay here all night?'—'What are you waiting for? The enemy?'—'*En avant, sacrebleu! en avant!*' Finally the wag of the crowd pipes out, in feeble imitation of the sonorous warning familiar to more fortunate travellers, '*Les voyageurs pour la ligne de Besançon, Belfort, Berlin, en voitu-r-e!*' Whereat there is a shrill chorus of laughter, for it does not take much to amuse the French soldier, and when want and suffering have done their worst upon him, his indomitable good humour will still come bravely to the front.

These men had been already twelve hours cramped up in their miserable boxes, with nothing to eat but mouldy biscuit, nothing to drink but water, and no plentiful supply of either. Some of them had their fingers and toes frost-bitten, many were ill, a few dying, or near it. They were an undisciplined lot for the most part, but they neither did nor said anything much worse than has been recorded. In a third-class carriage, near the front of the train, were a handful of officers—a colonel of cavalry, wrapped in his cloak and sleeping profoundly; an engineer, in spectacles; a major of artillery; a fat doctor, and a few young men wearing a species of uniform which might have belonged to any branch of the service. One of the latter put his head out of the window and hailed a passing guard.

'What is it now? What are we stopping for?'

'How should I know?' returned the man, sulkily, with a jerk of his shoulders, and slouched on to talk to the engine-driver. Officers were held in no great respect in France in those evil days; even their own men did not always take the trouble to salute them; and when one is only a lieutenant in a *corps franc*, one must not be too punctilious. The snubbed questioner withdrew his head quite meekly, and sank back upon the wooden seat with a gesture of mute resignation.

'You don't happen to have a cigarette about you, do you, De Mersac?' asked his opposite neighbour.

'Not I. Nor anything to drink either. Nor anything to eat, if you come to that.'

'Good. Precisely my own condition. And the worst of it is that I am much too cold to sleep.'

‘All that would be nothing if there were any necessity for it; but to think that all this time we might just as well have been at Bourges! that we are sent into action almost too weak to sit upon our horses simply because we are governed by a set of dolts who imagine that they can despatch an army from one place to another as easily as a telegram!’

‘Ah, the old story! Twenty thousand men are wanted to cut off the Prussian communications in the east. Nothing easier—make it forty thousand, so as to leave a margin. March them all down to the station double-quick; send off train after train as fast as they can be got ready; get the line hopelessly blocked; and then trust in Providence to put things straight somehow or other, and set to work composing proclamations. That is the way to carry on war according to the great citizen Gambetta. I wish I had him here!’

‘Patience, young men, patience,’ said the fat doctor placidly. ‘Be thankful that you have still all your limbs about you. You will see the Germans soon enough, never fear!’

‘That we certainly shall not, if we are to perish of cold in a railway carriage like so many flies.’ But at this moment another loud whistle pierced the air; the train began to move again; and the jerk awoke the sleeping colonel, who drew down his legs, rubbed his eyes, and asked, ‘Where are we? At Autun?’

‘God knows,’ answered the artilleryman. ‘Are we going to Autun? Apropos, M. de Saint-Iac, have you any idea where we *are* going?’

‘Not much. I have my own impressions; but I have been told next to nothing officially.’

‘The report at Bourges was that our destination was to be Besançon.’

‘I don’t know what we should do when we got there.’

The gunner shrugged his shoulders; but one of the younger officers struck in eagerly—‘We should invade Germany—at least that is what everybody is saying. It is only a question of one victory after all. We raise the siege of Belfort, we intercept the enemy’s communications, and we relieve Paris.’

‘I see.’

There was still a little spirit left among those who had fought so well and been beaten so often, a little confidence in their rulers, a lingering grain of faith in Fortune. Léon and his brother officers soon forgot all the sufferings of the present

in proving to one another the feasibility of some such surprise as the gossips of Bourges had prophesied. Saint-Luc smiled as he listened to them, but took no part in the discussion. He himself knowing something of soldiering and of the state of Bourbaki's army, had despaired long since; but it was not for him to discourage others, nor was he the less ready to struggle on to the end.

'In the meantime,' said he at last, 'let us hope that our next stoppage may be at a town where we can get some food for ourselves and for our horses; for if we go on at our present pace, we shall hardly reach Besançon before the day after to-morrow.'

Their deliverance, however, was at hand. At a small wayside station the Éclaireurs received orders to leave the train; and the colonel had his work cut out for him to collect his men and get his shivering horses upon terra firma. Some of the latter had died upon the journey; others had to be abandoned; many of the men were found unable to stand, and were told to remain where they were. It was no very formidable body that moved away at length from the station towards the village whose name it bore, but which lay some two miles away from it. Saint-Luc admitted none but old soldiers into his corps—the nature of their service as scouts demanding experience as well as courage—and he had had proofs enough that those who rode behind him could do and bear as much as can be expected of mortals; nevertheless, as he glanced over his shoulder at them now, he thanked his lucky stars that there were no Germans in the immediate neighbourhood.

'A handful of Uhlans could make short work of us,' he thought. 'What is one to do with starving men on starving horses? One thing is certain, they must be fed. I wonder whether there are any decent people in the village.'

Apparently there was nobody there at all, decent or otherwise. No trace of an inhabitant was to be seen in the wide, snow-covered high road, or in the low white houses that bordered it; pigs and poultry—usually the inseparable adjuncts of a French village—there were none; every door was closed and every window shuttered: only from a chimney here and there arose a tell-tale thread of blue smoke. Saint-Luc had seen this kind of thing more than once before, and knew very well what it all meant. His orders to his officers were soon given. They were to get what was necessary—civilly if possible, but at all events to get it; they were to pay for everything they

took ; and, above all, they were to lose no time. He himself rode on, accompanied by Léon, his adjutant, to a farmhouse a few furlongs out of the village, where there was an empty straw-yard, and stables, and out-houses, and a rick or two. Here much shouting, thundering at the door and threatening of arson, as a last resource, revealed the presence of a lean old woman of forbidding aspect.

‘What do you want?’ asked this inhospitable person sullenly, thrusting her head out of a half-opened window.

‘Something to eat, to begin with,’ answered Léon. ‘We are not particular ; give us what you have got and let us go, and we will pay you a fair price. We have money.’

‘Well, then, you will not have what you want, money or no money ! I know you with your money ! Break open the door if you like—you are the stronger—and eat me, for you will find nothing else here. And you will not find much flesh upon my bones, I promise you.’

‘My good woman,’ began Saint-Luc.

‘Good woman here, good woman there ! I tell you we have got nothing. Do you understand ?—nothing ! First come, first served. The Prussians took all we had ; then came the Garibaldians and helped themselves to the rest ; and now there are but the four walls and the bare boards left for you.’

‘I can’t waste any more time,’ said Saint-Luc. ‘Tell them to force the door, De Mersac.’

‘Stop, you thieves ! you villains ! Do you call yourselves Frenchmen, and would you ruin a poor widow ? I will let you in.’

Bolts and chains were slowly withdrawn ; the door was gingerly opened an inch or two, and a skinny hand appeared through the aperture. ‘Pay first,’ said the voice of the old woman from within.

Saint Luc laughed, and handed out a couple of napoleons. That will do till we see what you are going to give us,’ said he, pushing past her into the darkened kitchen, where a fine wood fire was blazing. ‘You might remember that we are friends, and that we are fighting your battles for you, old mother.’

‘Friends or enemies, it comes to much the same thing. Ah ! those Garibaldians ! People who call themselves friends, and rob you of your last sou, and use the churches for stables—thank you ! the Prussians suit me quite as well.’

‘Nobody is going to rob you,’ said Léon, who had followed

his chief into the house, and was looking about him with somewhat hungry eyes. 'And why did you tell us those lies? You peasants are all the same.'

'How was I to know you had money?' retorted his hostess, upon whom the sight of gold had already produced a slight mellowing effect. 'I am not the only one who tells lies in these bad times, young gentleman. And what I said was not so far off the truth either. I can kill two or three fowls for you and the other officer, and there is a little bacon; but as for the soldiers, I could not feed them if you offered me a fortune. Search the house if you don't believe me.'

Léon took her at her word. There would be no harm in having a look round, he thought, while the chickens were roasting, and it was absolutely necessary that something should be discovered for the men's eternal soup. French soldiers, as is well known, have a semi-miraculous gift for the concoction of that savoury mess out of the most unpromising materials; and though Léon's researches were not crowned with any brilliant success, yet a sufficiency of scraps was ultimately collected, in the farmhouse and elsewhere, to furnish what was required, and to restore the flagging spirits of the whole corps.

They were not hard to please, those gallant, ragged fellows. Give them soup, a fire to warm themselves by, and a tumbler or two of rough red wine, and they asked for nothing more. Enthusiastic they were no longer: but they were patient and willing, accustomed to hard knocks, hard fare, and scant thanks; ready for active service in any form; and now the rumour that they were for once about to take the offensive sufficed in itself to console them for a great deal. None of them had more than a very vague idea of where they were and of whither they were going; but these were mere matters of detail, and besides, it was nothing new to them to be in the dark as to their whereabouts. The colonel, never given to be communicative, disliked being asked questions, and his officers, knowing this, seldom interrogated him. When they did so, their curiosity was not often gratified. Léon, who upon this occasion ventured to throw out a hint or two, got no information for his pains.

'Werder must be somewhere between Vesoul and Gray, I take it,' said he, buckling up his sword, when the hasty repast was at an end; 'but I suppose we shall know all about it before long. We are off on the old errand of course—feeling for the enemy to begin with, searching for our own general afterwards,

and thinking ourselves more than lucky if we find the second as easily as the first. Well, it is better to be an *éclaireur* than a general after all; one obeys orders and asks no questions—that is simple enough. Only I *should* like to know whether our object is to join Faidherbe or to make a raid into Germany.’

Saint-Luc was standing by the window looking out at the darkening landscape and the snowflakes, which were still dropping at intervals and freezing as they fell.

‘There are so many things that one would like to know,’ he remarked. ‘I should like, for instance, to know why I was born; but nobody will ever be able to tell me that;—and then I should like to know where I am to sleep to-night, which is a mystery that will be solved in a few hours. And I should like to know what certain people far away are doing at this moment, though I have no doubt at all that it is a very good thing for me that I can’t. Did it ever occur to you that if we knew the whole truth about everything, nine-tenths of us would most likely go and hang ourselves? Come, let us get to horse again, and follow our noses; and don’t you trouble yourself too much to find out whither the road is leading you. The more you knew of it the less you would like it perhaps.’

Already the bugles had sent forth their brief summons, and the regiment only awaited the Colonel’s order to march. A few of the villagers—poverty-stricken, timorous-looking folks—had emerged from their hiding-places on discovering that the invaders were Frenchmen this time, not Prussians nor Garibaldi, and had now come shivering out into the road to see the last of these ragged horsemen; and to bid them God-speed. For good wishes cost nothing; and if there be anything that can warm the heart of the French peasant, it is probably the touch of hard coin.

As the little band began to move with a muffled trampling over the snow, and the clank of a sabre or the champing of a bit here and there, some of the men set up a low, melancholy chant. It was the familiar strain of the Marseillaise that they sang; but what a different Marseillaise from that which had rung triumphantly and defiantly throughout the length and breadth of France a few short months before!—

‘Amour sacré de la patrie,
Conduis, soutiens nos bras vengeurs!’

The chorus spread through the ranks, one man after another taking it up in a sad perfunctory sort of way, and grew fainter

and fainter as they passed out from the village, and wound round the shoulder of a low hill—a straggling troop of shadowy riders in long blue cloaks that soon faded into the gathering darkness.

‘Would one not say they were a regiment of ghosts singing their own dirge?’ muttered the old woman who had entertained Saint-Luc and Léon. ‘Soldiers were another race in my time. That colonel is a fine man, but he has not the look of a joyous comrade. *Enfin!—puisque ça paye.*’

And with that she bolted and barred her door once more, and sat down to count her earnings.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BEDFORD SQUARE.

BEDFORD SQUARE is not a cheerful situation. Miss Barrington, who lived there, was always ready to admit that much. She maintained, however, that there was no more comfortable, no better-built house in London than that which had come to her by inheritance. Its rooms were spacious; its staircase was broad and shallow; there was accommodation in it for more guests than its mistress ever cared to invite. The heavy, solid furniture, the old pictures darkened by many a year of London smoke, the well-used books in the library, in their sober, uniform binding of brown calf—all these would look shabby and out of place in a more fashionable quarter; and, in spite of many an entreaty and remonstrance, Miss Barrington declined to move them. Bloomsbury suited her well enough, she said; and if any of the nephews and nieces, god-sons and god-daughters, who honoured her with so much of their attention, found the journey thither from South Kensington or Belgravia more than they could undertake, why the alternative course of remaining away was open to them.

It was on a grey January afternoon that Jeanne was driven to the door of this hospitable mansion in the brougham which had been sent to the station to meet her. Christmas, laboriously merry, was over and done with; so, for the time, was life at Holmhurst, and the society of its well-meaning, if somewhat commonplace, inmates; and now our heroine was about to enter

upon fresh experiences, to be introduced to new faces, and to renew her acquaintance with one or two already familiar to her. And, perhaps, the latter prospect was what she chiefly looked forward to, and may have had something to do with the cheerfulness of her demeanour.

Some cause for inward rejoicing she must have had; for if there be a spectacle in the world calculated to cause the heart of a foreigner to die within him, it must surely be that of London as viewed through the gloom and moisture of a winter's afternoon; yet Mademoiselle de Mersac stepped lightly out on to the pavement, while the footman was making a tremendous and most unnecessary noise with the door-knocker, and surveyed, with a smile of universal benevolence the hideous buildings around her, the miserable bare trees in the square, the dirty old effigy who looked down upon her shamefacedly from his stone pedestal, and the crossing-sweeper who came hurrying up, hat in hand.

The crossing-sweeper received an unearned sixpence, much to the disgust of Miss Barrington's butler, who had now thrown open the double doors, and presently Jeanne was alone in the drawing-room upstairs, awaiting the appearance of her hostess.

She had not long to wait in solitude. But it was not Miss Barrington who came clattering down the stairs, burst open the drawing room door, and advanced, with both hands outstretched, exclaiming, 'How glad I am that you have come! Do you know, I never heard you were expected to-day until I came in, about ten minutes ago.'

'How do you do, Mr. Barrington?' says Jeanne, as coolly as if she had not been dreaming of this meeting for the last fortnight. 'Are you staying here, too, then?'

'What, in this house, do you mean? Oh, no; I have rooms of my own in London—ever so far away, I am sorry to say. I am afraid you must think my Aunt Susan rather rude for not being in to receive you; but she is an oddity, you know; no one minds what she does. I got a note from her this morning, telling me to be here punctually at four o'clock. I accordingly turned up at that hour, and was told that she had gone out. But this house has always been a sort of second home to me, and I can do just as I like in it; so I went upstairs, to a room which has been reserved for my use ever since I was a boy, and where I sometimes do a little painting, and so on; and there I found a second note to say that you were coming up from Holm-

hurst, and that I was to receive you, and apologise for my aunt's absence. She is a good old thing,' concluded Barrington, reflectively. But how her goodness had been evidenced by this particular line of conduct he did not state; and that, no doubt, was Mademoiselle de Mersac's reason for remaining silent.

'I hope you don't mind?' resumed Barrington presently.

'Oh, no,' Jeanne said, 'she did not mind at all.' But, for all that, she was not quite pleased. It would have been much pleasanter, she thought, if Mr. Barrington had been invited to dinner, instead of having been asked to receive her upon her arrival. And how long would she have to sit there in her travelling-dress, and with the dust and the cinders of the railway upon her?

Perhaps Barrington, who had never removed his eyes once from her face since his entrance, may have read there some indication of these thoughts, for he exclaimed suddenly—

'Good gracious me, what a donkey I am! You would like to take off your hat, would you not? And then, of course, you will want some tea. I will ring, and tell them.'

The butler came up in answer to his summons, and said that tea would be ready in a few minutes; and Miss Barrington's maid appearing in his wake, Jeanne was conducted to her room, where she remained for what seemed to Barrington an interminable time.

He roamed about the room during her absence, sometimes standing with his back to the fire, sometimes looking absently out of the window and drumming with his fingers on the pane, picking up one of the books that lay on the table every now and then, or pausing to examine some recent additions to Miss Barrington's store of hideous and valuable china; but all the time he was thinking only of Jeanne. How rejoiced he was to see that lovely pale face again; and how he had missed it! he said to himself with a certain disquietude, and yet not without some mixture of satisfaction at the remembrance. He had been visiting at several country-houses, where he had been one of a large and very merry party; he had spent the greater part of the time in an excellent hunting country; he had met the people whose society he generally enjoyed the most, and he had found the whole thing an unmitigated bore. Evidently he could not live without Jeanne. Yes, it had come to that; and doubtless, before very long, it would come to an engagement. 'I can't lose sight of her again,' mused Barrington, as he paced to and fro. 'Before she leaves this, the fatal words must be

spoken. Dear, dear, how funny it will all be! Fancy her making my tea for me in the morning, and sewing buttons on to my shirts! Oh, bathos! It will be a great nuisance having to announce the engagement. How furious the Ashleys will be; and all one's relations too!

This set him wondering what could be the cause of Aunt Susan's conduct in bringing him and Jeanne together, as she evidently intended to do. Was it that she was tired of Helen Ashley, and had seized the first pretext that had come to hand for throwing her over? Was it that she had really taken a fancy to the beautiful stranger? Or was she behaving in this way out of pure love of mischief, and a desire to set everybody by the ears? Barrington knew that some such motive had been at the root of more than one of his aunt's apparent eccentricities, and he was not disposed to count over much upon her support now. 'I can do without her money—that's one thing,' thought he; and then his reflections were cut short by Jeanne's reappearance.

She seated herself beside the low tea-table, and began to pour out a cup of tea, while Barrington took a chair opposite to her.

'I hope you are not very tired after your journey,' said he, just by way of opening the conversation.

'Tired?' she echoed, with some disdain. 'No; I am not so easily tired as that.'

'Of course not; I forgot. I am so accustomed to associating with ladies who are more or less frail and rickety, that I have come to look upon ordinary good health as the exclusive property of men. Isn't it an odd thing that hardly anybody is proud of being strong and well; whereas lots of people make a positive boast of their infirmities? My sister, for instance, would be desperately offended if I suggested that she could travel from Sevenoaks to Charing Cross without being completely knocked up.'

'But your sister is really an invalid, is she not?'

'I don't know. Aunt Susan says a bucket of cold water is all she wants; and I am half inclined to hold the same opinion. There cannot be very much the matter with her; or she would have succumbed long ago to one of the violent courses of medical treatment she has been through. However, you will probably see her for yourself before long, and then you will be able to form your own judgment upon her. You won't like her, I know.'

'How can you tell that?'

'Oh, she is not the sort of person whom you would be in the least inclined to put up with. I bear with her partly because she is my sister and partly because I am of a tolerant nature, and don't expect any very near approach to perfection from anybody. But we won't waste time in talking about her. What is the news down at Holmhurst?'

'I don't think there is any news,' replied Jeanne, consideringly. 'Everybody is quite well, except my uncle, who——'

'Who has got the gout from drinking too much port wine during Christmas week. I know. He always does. It is a part of his annual programme, and he would not relinquish it for worlds. And I will venture to affirm that Mrs. Ashley's clothing-club has got into debt, and that the girls have two or three dances in prospect, and that one or more of the dogs has died of distemper. All these events come round as regularly as the month of January itself. Apropos, how did you leave my friend Turco?'

'I did not leave him at all,' answered Jeanne. 'I brought him with me.'

'You *don't* mean to tell me that my Aunt Susan has actually invited a dog into her house!' exclaimed Barrington, with raised eyebrows of astonishment. 'You must indeed have won her heart.'

'She did not exactly invite him to the house,' Jeanne explained. 'I left him at the stables, on my way here. He will be rather troublesome, I am afraid, for unless he has exercise he always gets ill; so I shall have to take him for a walk somewhere every day.'

'Quite right. I'll go with you,' observed Barrington, cheerfully.

'Oh, no, thank you,' returned Jeanne, with a sudden chilly change in her voice; 'that will not be at all necessary.'

'I beg your pardon, but it will be most absolutely necessary. Young ladies can't walk about London alone, especially if they happen to be accompanied by a dog the size of a pony. Besides, you would lose yourself before you had walked a quarter of a mile.'

'I lose myself!' cried Jeanne, indignantly. 'What an idea! I should be ashamed to lose myself in a town. Why, even among the mountains in Algeria, where it is not very easy to distinguish one pass or valley from another, I could always find my way from place to place alone. I carry a little compass

on my watch-chain; and as soon as I have—I do not know how to say it in English—*une fois que je me suis orientée*—I am quite at my ease.’

‘I’m afraid you won’t find that system answer very well in London,’ said Barrington, laughing.

‘Why not?’ inquired Jeannie, loftily. She did not like being laughed at.

‘Oh, well, for one thing, you wouldn’t be able to steer a straight course, don’t you see? You can’t go over the tops of the houses, so you would be obliged to follow the streets, and the compass would come out at every corner. You had much better take me with you, and I will show you the most direct route to the parks—which, by the way, are an enormous distance from this quarter—and then, when your dog has chased the water fowl and worried the sheep, I shall be at hand to plead your cause with the park-keeper, who will come up to give you in charge.’

‘Turco never does such things,’ answered Jeanne, really a little offended. ‘And I can find my way very well alone, thank you. I like walking alone.’

At this moment Miss Barrington came in; and as soon as the proper amount of greeting, inquiry, and apology had been gone through, Barrington reverted to the controversy which her entrance had interrupted.

‘Aunt Susan, is it the proper thing for a young lady to walk about the streets of Bloomsbury alone and unprotected?’

‘I don’t know, I’m sure. I used to do it when I was young, and nobody ever bothered me; but no doubt it would be wiser for you to take care of Mademoiselle de Mersac when she goes out, if that is what you mean.’

‘Mademoiselle de Mersac refuses to let me accompany her,’ answered Barrington. ‘She proposes to penetrate into the heart of London with the aid of a compass and a big dog, and she laughs me to scorn when I suggest the possibility of her losing her way. It is easy to see what that kind of pride is likely to lead to. A gloomy cell in the nearest police station, mademoiselle, will be your fate. After a night of horrors, you will be led before a stern and pitiless old man, who will disbelieve every word you say, and denounce your conduct in terms which will make your blood curdle. You will be ordered to pay a fine, and as you are sure to have no money in your pocket, you will be cast into prison for seven days.

Your dog will be dragged away, with a halter round his neck, and —;

‘That is nonsense,’ interrupted Jeanne, gravely.

‘Aunt Susan, I appeal to you. Is there anything improbable about this slight prophetic sketch? Is it likely that a dog, unaccustomed to London life, will be able to pass through all the temptations of the metropolis without getting himself and others into trouble? Think of the mutton-chops lying, all handy, at the butcher’s, and the other dogs to be fought with, and the perambulators to be howled over, and the prowling roughs whom it would seem a positive duty to tackle. I declare, if I were you, I would not allow a young lady under my charge to go about in such dangerous company for any consideration. That is, unless she had a prudent and experienced person with her to get her out of scrapes.’

‘Turco is never disobedient; and as for stealing from a butcher, he would not even dream of such a thing. I have always been able to take care of myself, and I always intend to do so,’ said Jeanne decisively.

‘Well, settle it between you,’ said Miss Barrington, with a short laugh. ‘I must go and write some letters now. Stay to dinner, you know, if you like, Harry; there will be nobody but ourselves.’

‘I have asked a man to dine with me at the club—what a bore!’ murmured Barrington, regretfully, as the door closed behind his aunt. ‘But I shall see you some time to-morrow, I hope. Of course you will have to be shown all the sights of London; and if I am to be allowed to do nothing else for you, I trust you will at least let me act as your guide to them.’

‘I suppose there is a great deal to be seen,’ remarked Jeanne, a little apprehensively.

‘An immensity. Take architecture alone. There is the National Gallery, and Buckingham Palace, and St. Thomas’s Hospital, and the church at the end of Langham Place, and many other remarkable buildings, all very striking in their way, and some absolutely unique in style. Then you will naturally want to climb to the top of the Monument, and likewise to the top of St. Paul’s. The Zoological Gardens, the Underground Railway, and Madame Tussaud’s will all repay a visit. After that there will be the British Museum, the Crystal Palace, the——’

‘But must I really see all these things?’ interrupted Jeanne, in dismay.

‘Of course not. You ought to have a look at Westminster;

but there is nothing else worth seeing in London just now. that I know of, except a picture of Gérôme's, which is in the French Artists' Gallery in Pall Mall. You did not come to England to admire French art, you will say; but unhappily we have none of our own to show you. That astounding exhibition, the Royal Academy, is not open at this time of year, and if it were, I am afraid you might search it through and through without coming across even an embryo Gérôme. French art is, and doubtless always will be, immeasurably superior to ours; and the reasons are not far to seek. In the first place, our painters habitually degrade themselves in their choice of subjects. They paint what will sell. They bow to the crude, vulgar taste of the purchaser, instead of trying to elevate it. Then, again——'

But it is perhaps hardly necessary to follow Mr. Barrington through the lengthy disquisition in which he thought fit to indulge upon this not very novel subject.

The next morning being a fine frosty one, and Miss Barrington having gone out upon business directly after breakfast, Mademoiselle de Mersac judged that the opportunity had now come for her to display her knowledge of locality and her independence of officious protection. Without any difficulty she found her way to the mews where she had left her dog on the previous afternoon, and was at once recognised by Miss Barrington's coachman, who touched his hat, opened the stable-door for her, and, in reply to her inquiry, told her that she would find Hyde Park easily enough.

'It's a goodish way, miss, but you can't make no mistake about it. Fust turn to your right, then fust to your left, then to your right agin, into a very fine, long street, and arter that you've only got to walk straight on, as fur as you can go, till you see the Park afore you.'

Nothing could be plainer. 'I am much obliged to you,' said Jeanne, setting off at once, and remembering, with some inward amusement, Barrington's prophetic warnings. It was scarcely within the limits of possibility, she thought, that she should make any mistake in following such simple directions as these.

Many a pedestrian turned to look curiously after her, as she went on her way through the smoke-dimmed atmosphere, a tall, erect, black-draped figure, with her great white dog following at her heels; but both she and Turco were accustomed to being stared at, and never heeded the gaze of the vulgar multitude.

One of them, indeed, was too busy making use of her own eyes to notice whether those of others were fixed upon her or not.

‘What dirty streets! What hideous houses! What a stifling, choking air!’ she was thinking to herself. ‘No wonder all the people look so pale. If I were Miss Barrington, I would not live here for the sake of any house, however comfortable. I wonder where the fashionable quarter is, and whether I shall pass through it before I reach the Park.’

While she was thus musing, she found her path suddenly barred by a double line of cabs, omnibuses, and carts. There was a momentary stoppage; then the stream flowed on, and Jeanne, crossing hurriedly to the opposite pavement—for she was not quite at home amid the noisy traffic of a large town—pursued her way through a somewhat less crowded district. It was Oxford Street that she had left behind her, having altogether failed to recognise in it that imposing thoroughfare of which Miss Barrington’s coachman had spoken, and having, in fact, before her mind’s eye a vision of a broad, straight boulevard, at the end of which, in the far distance, the trees of Hyde Park might probably be discernible. But as she went on, and on, and the streets narrowed instead of widening, and the noise of hoofs and wheels grew ever fainter, she began to perceive that she must have made some mistake. She paused, and went over again in her mind the directions the man had given her. The first turn to the right, and the first, after that, to the left, she remembered to have taken. And then he had told her to turn to the right again, when she came to a fine, long street, which, apparently, she had somehow missed. It was evident, however, that Hyde Park must lie to her right hand, due west of her, and that if she set her face in that direction, and walked straight on, she must eventually strike it at one point or another.

This conclusion being beyond question, Jeanne proceeded to act upon it. She turned off at right angles to the street in which she had been standing, and immediately plunged into the midst of the most miserable, squalid, horrible collection of human dwellings she had ever beheld in her life. On either side of her were dirty, dilapidated houses, whose tenants must have been of a very destructive habit, judging from the amount of broken window-panes among them that were covered with scraps of paper or stuffed up with filthy rags. The street itself

was littered with orange-peel, cabbage-stalks, and refuse of all kinds. A drunken old man was standing in the middle of it, his hands in his pockets, his eyes half closed, as he swayed from side to side, muttering to himself and laughing idiotically. A couple of bare-armed, touzle-headed viragoes were leaning out of an upper window, laughing too, but in harsh, cracked voices that had little sound of merriment in them. Jeanne hurried on.

After a time she came to a corner where two or three dirty, greasy-looking men were lounging round a post, and of one of them she boldly asked her way; but he glancing up at her with bloodshot eyes full of suspicion, and an infinite suppressed ferocity in his rejoinder, 'Way to *wheer*?' she fairly lost heart, and walked away, as fast as she could, without uttering another word.

On she went, through narrow streets which seemed to lead only to a limitless succession of similar ones; round many a sharp corner, and into more than one *cul de sac*, whence she had to retrace her steps, with an ever-increasing feeling of doubt as to whether she would ever be able to discover again the road by which she had entered into this labyrinth. She was getting a little frightened now—not, indeed, of the few people whom she met, and who, for the most part, scarcely took the trouble to raise their eyes from the ground to look at her; but of some vague danger that seemed to be in the air. And certainly there was something rather trying to the nerves in the silence that hung over this densely-populated district—a silence broken only by the sound of shuffling footsteps or of occasional hoarse, muffled voices, and intensified by the ceaseless roar of the traffic outside its limits, which rose and fell like breakers on a distant, shingly bar. Jeanne could not divest her mind of a shuddering conviction that presently one of these grim, mute tenements would burst into life, that from it would rush a gang of ruffians, and that, before she should have time to cry for help, she would be pinioned, gagged, robbed—perhaps murdered.

It was quite a relief when somebody came down the street, whistling a popular air cheerily, and breaking off, every now and then, to pipe out a few words of the chorus in a loud, shrill voice. Jeanne made for him at once.

'Will you be so good as to direct me to Hyde Park?' said she, in her best English.

'Hyde Park, miss? Certainly, miss. You come along o' me, I'll put you straight in the way. 'Arry' (to an acquaintance

who was loitering on the other side of the street), 'I shall 'ave to bid you good morning; I'm a-goin' to walk in the Park with this 'ere young lady.'

He was a thin, undersized creature, whether boy or man it was not easy to determine. His clothes, which were of the poorest description, seemed to have been originally the property of a Hercules, so loosely did they hang upon his skinny person. His boots—also several sizes too large for him—scarcely he'd together; and from time to time he coughed in a way that it made Jeanne quite miserable to hear.

As he slouched along by her side, jerking his shoulders with every step, she looked down at the queer, wizened little face beneath his fur cap, and a sudden impulse made her ask, 'Are you hungry?'

'I *ham*, miss,' he replied, with emphasis. 'Four days and four nights it is since I've 'ad a mossel o' bread to put in me—let a'one meat or sperrits.'

'That cannot be true,' said Jeanne unhesitatingly. She had seen famine times in Algeria, and knew pretty well the effect of hunger in its various stages upon the human subject.

Her guide did not allow himself to be at all disconcerted. If he was not starving, he said, he was at all events hungry; and he proceeded to relate so harrowing a tale of the temptations that beset a well-meaning young man who is without visible means of subsistence in London that in a very short time Jeanne had promised to give him ten shillings if he would agree, on his side, to associate no more with thieves and to try and obtain some honest work. This engagement he entered into quite readily, confirming it with asseverations of the most solemn character; and as they were now once more in the region of cabs, he strongly recommended the young lady to take a four-wheeler, adding that he himself would be glad to retire, as there was a policeman in those parts with whom he was not upon terms of friendship.

'Good-bye, then,' said Jeanne, 'and thank you for bringing me so far. Here is——'

A pause. Jeanne's hand was slowly withdrawn from her pocket.

'What shall I do!' she exclaimed. 'My purse is gone!'

'You don't say so, miss! Wot, yer purse gone?—likewise yer pocket-andkercher, I s'pose? Dear, dear, dear! that's wot it is to walk about in a low quarter. They *are* a terrible bad lot 'ereabouts, miss, and that's the truth.'

‘But nobody ever brushed up against me even,’ protested Jeanne, still bewildered by her loss.

‘Don’t you believe it, miss! They’re that hartful you wouldn’t ’ardly know nothink about it if they was to take the ’at off your ’ead.’

‘Well, it cannot be helped. I should not mind so much, only now I have not ten shillings to give you.’

‘I beg you won’t mention that, miss.’

‘Oh, but I must keep my promise; and if you will come to Number 63, Bedford Square, this afternoon, I will certainly give you the ten shillings. *Oh!*—where’s my dog?’

‘Dorg, miss? I didn’t see no dorg.’

‘You *must* have seen him—a big white dog—he was following me when I met you. Oh, what shall I do?’

‘How do you do, Mademoiselle de Mersac? And pray, if one may ask, what has brought you to the Seven Dials?’

Jeanne turned round, and found the grey eyes of Mr. Leigh scrutinising her with an expression of some amusement

‘Oh, Mr. Leigh,’ she exclaimed, ‘I have had such a misfortune! I have lost my dog. What had I better do, do you think?’

‘There is nothing to be done, except to advertise a reward for him. You will be sure to get him back in a day or two. It would be quite useless to search St. Giles’s for him. But how do you come to be here at all?’

‘I set out to walk to the Park,’ Jeanne explained; ‘and somehow I lost my way, and really I do not think I should ever have been heard of again if it had not been for this boy—where is he? Oh, now he is gone too! What a very odd and disagreeable place London seems to be!’

‘The boy and the dog disappeared together, I suspect?’

‘Oh, no! I missed Turco while I was still talking to him; and besides, he is to come to Bedford Square this afternoon, to be paid for showing me the way. For I have lost my purse also,’ concluded Jeanne, looking rather ashamed of herself.

‘Then you may depend upon it that the boy has got your purse as well as your dog, and I shall be very much astonished if you ever see him again.’

‘Poor boy!’ sighed Jeanne. ‘He said he was a thief.’

‘Capital! And so your sympathies were aroused, and no doubt you would have given him all the money you had with you, if he had not helped himself to it already. That’s just the sort of way Barrington gets done. I left him, a few minutes

ago, talking Italian very loud to a dirty little wretch of an organ-grinder, with an admiring assembly elbowing him. I remained for a short time while they jabbered, and shook their fingers at each other, and then, as I didn't want to have my pocket picked, I walked on. Shall we wait for him? He was on his way to call upon you, I believe.'

'Oh, I would rather not wait! I shall go home now if you will be so kind as to call a *fiacre* for me,' answered Jeanne, feeling that she could not brave an interview with Barrington after so speedy a fulfilment of his predictions.

'Very well. Hullo!—get down, you brute!'

This last apostrophe was addressed to a large white dog, with a fragment of rope round his neck, who had suddenly darted out of a side street, and who, after knocking Mr. Leigh off the pavement, was now alternately leaping up to Jeanne's shoulders and cringing at her feet.

'*Ah coquin!—mauvais drôle—va!*' cried Jeanne, indignantly. 'I am obliged to scold him,' she explained, 'or else he would allow himself to be enticed away again. Do you see how he is licking his lips? I know very well how they managed to steal him.'

'He has probably killed somebody,' observed Leigh; 'your interesting little boy, I dare say. Well, it would serve him right. Here comes Barrington, all smiles. I think I could afford to lay a shade of odds that that organ-grinder has got a sovereign out of him. I say, Barrington, could you oblige me with the loan of a pound or so?'

'My dear fellow, I can't. I have just given away the last penny,—what are you laughing at? And where has Mademoiselle de Mersac sprung from? And, oh, Turco, my esteemed friend, is that a rope that I see about your neck? What in the world has been happening?'

Explanations followed, at the end of which Jeanne found herself somehow being whirled along in a hansom, with Barrington by her side, and Turco between them. Poor Mr. Leigh had presumably been left in the street, to go home, or do with himself what he pleased. Neither Jeanne nor Barrington wasted another thought upon him.

'Another time,' the latter was saying, 'you will believe, perhaps, that I know something about the dangers of London. It is the greatest mercy in the world that you did not wander into some worse place than you did. There are plenty of streets in London out of which you certainly would not have

been allowed to escape with your watch and rings. I do hope you will not attempt any more journeys of discovery.'

'Oh, no!' answered Jeanne, with a slight shudder. 'I shall never wish to be alone in the streets of this horrible town again. But it is very disagreeable to be obliged always to take some one with you when you walk out.'

'Very; but I'm afraid there is no help for it. We need not speak to each other, you know, unless you like.'

Jeanne did not understand anything in the form of 'chaff,' which, indeed, is a product indigenous to British soil.

'That would be very absurd,' she answered, seriously. Then, after a moment's hesitation, 'I do not know anything of English customs,' she added. 'With us it would not be considered *convenable* that I should go about with you like this. In the country it was perhaps a little different; but here——'

'Aunt Susan approves of it,' replied Barrington; 'and I can assure you that Aunt Susan never violates the proprieties. And, besides, we are such old friends.'

'Yes,' answered Jeanne, rather absently. And after that not another word was said until the hansom drew up in Bedford Square.

A carriage was standing before Miss Barrington's door, from which a lady was deliberately alighting with the assistance of a gentleman on one side and a footman on the other.

'It is the Seymours—my sister and her husband, you know,' Barrington said, rather ruefully. 'They are come to lunch. What an awful, *awful* bore! Well, Amelia, how are you to-day? How do, Seymour?'

'I am very much out of sorts,' Mr. Seymour was beginning; but his wife broke in, before he had half finished his sentence, with—

'Harry, what are you doing in London at this time of year? I thought you never, by any chance, came up before May'

'Oh, yes, I do!' answered Barrington, looking a little annoyed. 'Of course I do. Why, I am always coming up to have my hair cut—and things. I want to introduce you to Mademoiselle de Mersac, who is staying with Aunt Susan. Seymour, let me introduce you to Mademoiselle de Mersac.'

Mr. Seymour made a clutch at his hat. He was a little, weebe gone, colourless man, with watery blue eyes and thin whiskers, which hung dejectedly down from his hollow cheeks.

'You must find this climate very trying, coming from the warm south,' he said in a plaintive, sing-song voice.

Mrs. Seymour, tall, hook-nosed, lackadaisical, and very expensively dressed, said nothing, except, 'How do you do?' and stood, with her head on one side, leaning lightly against the area railings. What Mrs. Seymour was thinking was, 'This will never, never do! What can Aunt Susan be thinking of to let Harry go driving about with that too lovely girl! And he who is so susceptible too! This must be put a stop to at once.'

And then the door was opened, and they all went into the house together.

CHAPTER XXXV

IN WHICH BARRINGTON DISPLAYS MUCH TACT.

'WELL, Amelia,' said Miss Barrington, as she took her place at the head of the luncheon table, 'and how are you? Very ill, I suppose, eh?'

'Thank you, I have been particularly well lately—for me,' answered Mrs. Seymour, in a feeble, drawling voice. 'I am not free from pain, of course; but that is nothing. You, I know, never believe in anybody's being ill unless they have small-pox, or typhus fever, or something of that kind.'

'I have been miserably seedy the last few days,' began Mr. Seymour, but nobody noticed him; so he sighed, and relapsed into silence.

'Well, you know, Amelia,' Miss Barrington was saying, 'I have always maintained that imagination has more to do with most illnesses than is generally supposed. I have noticed that people who haven't time to be ill always manage to keep in good health. Look at statesmen, and judges, and barristers in large practice, for instance. You never hear of one of them being kept to his room, unless it is by a touch of the gout.'

'Oh, but they are picked men, you know; otherwise they would not be where they are,' protested Mr. Seymour.

'Perhaps so; but that would not prevent them having occasional colds, and headaches, and so on, like the rest of the world. They don't think about them, that's all. Don't you know that it is an acknowledged fact that by fixing your whole mind upon your little finger for an hour, you can make it ache most horribly? And then everybody has heard of the man

who was taken into what they told him was the cholera ward in the hospital, and who incontinently took the cholera, and died, though there had not been a single case of it in the town up to that time. And there was the man whom they bled to death at Berlin, by blindfolding him, pricking his arm with a pin, and letting drops of warm water trickle slowly down it, assuring him, all the time, that he was gradually sinking. Never mind, Amelia, don't be offended. Have a mutton-chop.'

'No, thank you' (with a slight shudder).

'Curry, then? Oh, no, of course you can't eat curry. Ernest, will you see if there is anything on the table that your wife can eat?'

'I really—I am afraid—it's of no consequence, you know, but——' stammered Mr. Seymour, deprecatingly.

'My dear Ernest, don't apologise. Ring the bell, Harry, and we will order something suitable for invalids. What shall it be, Amelia? Beef-tea?'

'Oh, *dear* no, thank you,' murmured Mrs. Seymour, with half-closed eyes. 'I have not been able to stand beef-tea for months. Pray don't trouble about me.'

'Well, you can't live without nourishment of some sort or kind,' observed Miss Barrington. 'Tapioca pudding?—toast-and-water?—gruel?—Du Barry's Revalenta Arabica?—Cockle's Pills?—only tell us what you are accustomed to sustain life upon, and I have no doubt Bloomsbury will be able to produce it in a quarter of an hour.'

Finally Mrs. Seymour said she thought she could manage a cup of tea and a biscuit; and then Miss Barrington turned to Jeanne.

'So you have been out for a walk already, I hear,' said she. 'Where did Harry pick you up? At the police-station, as he predicted?'

'No; it has not been quite so bad as that,' answered Jeanne, smiling; 'but I have been very much frightened, and I shall never walk out in London alone again. I lost my way almost immediately, and found myself in a terrible part of the town, where they stole my purse and tried to steal Turco, and from which I should never have escaped, I believe, if it had not been for——'

'Harry, of course,' interrupted Miss Barrington, with one of her short laughs.

'No; a ragged little boy—or man—I could not say which

he was, who showed me the way back to a street where there were cabs, and then ran off, without waiting to be paid. I told him to call here this afternoon, because I had lost my purse, and had nothing to give him; but Mr. Leigh thinks he will not come.'

'I don't know,' said Barrington, reflectively. 'Having already possessed himself of your purse, he may very probably feel a hankering after your watch also. I should say he will turn up, as likely as not, in the course of the day, keep you engaged in interesting conversation, while he slips any little articles of value that may happen to be lying handy into his pocket, and takes a few mental notes of the arrangements of the house, so that he and some fellow-ruffians may the more easily make their way into it to-morrow night, and empty the plate-chest.'

'All right,' said Miss Barrington. 'Let him show himself here, and he shall be handed over to the police.'

'Then I hope he will not come,' said Jeanne. 'I should be sorry to get him into trouble. I dare say he is a thief, but I don't think it was he who tried to steal Turco; and could you expect any boy to be honest, living in that terrible place? It made me feel quite ill only to see it, and to breathe the air.'

'No!—did it?' exclaimed Mr. Seymour, eagerly. 'How did it make you feel? A sort of swimming in the head, and then a trembling about the knees, and then a dreadful access of nausea? Was that it? Now this is very interesting; because I experienced precisely the same sensations myself, some years ago, when an old schoolfellow of mine, who has a living in the East of London, insisted upon taking me into some of the courts and alleys of his parish. It was really too horrible! Nothing but a strong effort of will kept me from fainting away; and when we got out, I said at once—"My dear fellow," I said, "here's ten pounds; and when you want more, you know, I shall always be delighted to help you to the best of my poor ability. But you must never expect me to do this again—you really must not." And then I went home, and was exceedingly unwell all night. It is curious how anything in the form of a bad smell upsets me directly. I recollect once—it was very awkward—I was walking with a lady in Rome, and we came to a place where they were cleaning out a sewer. I simply turned my head away, and was violently sick. I apologised, of course, and felt dreadfully ashamed of myself; but really it was no fault of mine.'

‘How very unpleasant! I wish you would reserve these charming reminiscences for some time when one does not happen to be eating, Ernest,’ said Miss Barrington.

Whereupon Mr. Seymour meekly begged pardon, and said no more. He was accustomed to snubs from all quarters, and did not much mind them now.

‘You have not told us yet where you met Harry,’ said Mrs. Seymour, suddenly straightening herself up in her chair. And Jeanne wondered why this languid, die-away lady should look at her so oddly.

‘I do not know where it was,’ she replied. ‘It was in a street—or rather in a sort of dirty little *place*——’

‘Seven Dials, Amelia, if you insist upon accuracy,’ put in Barrington.

‘And I was talking to Mr. Leigh, whom I had just met, and wondering how I should get back here. And then Mr. Barrington came up; and so we took a street carriage, and returned.’

‘I see,’ said Mrs. Seymour drily, and sank back in her chair again. She could not have said ‘I disapprove’ more plainly.

Nobody spoke for a minute; and then Miss Barrington broke the silence by asking Jeanne if she was fond of music, ‘because,’ said she, ‘I took three tickets some time ago for a concert that is to be given to-day, meaning them for you and myself, and for anybody else who might turn up—Harry, perhaps. And now I don’t see how I can possibly contrive to go there, for I must be five miles away from St. James’s Hall at half-past four. But I should like you to go, if it could be managed. It will be something for you to do, and there will be some really good music. Harry, I wish you would take Mademoiselle de Mersac.’

‘I should like nothing better,’ answered Barrington. But he could not help looking a little surprised; and Mrs. Seymour’s forehead became lined with horizontal wrinkles.

‘Don’t make faces, Amelia dear,’ said Miss Barrington, quietly. ‘Of course I meant that you should go too.’

‘I go to a concert! My dear Aunt Susan! *Really!*’

Mrs. Seymour’s voice rang out quite clear and strong, so deep was her sense of the want of common feeling implied in such a proposition.

‘Then Ernest shall go.’

A deprecating murmur from Mr. Seymour died away unheeded.

‘Yes, that will be the best plan. Somebody really must go, you know; it would be absurd to pay for three tickets and never use them. Ernest, my dear fellow, it will do you all the good in the world. You will enjoy yourself immensely once you are in the concert room. You shall be driven there in the carriage, and you can keep both the windows up, if you like; and when you arrive there, you know, you can roll yourself up in great-coats and rugs and things; and I have got an old black velvet skull-cap upstairs, which used to belong to my father, and which I will lend you for the afternoon. Altogether, I think you will have quite a treat. The carriage will be round in a quarter of an hour, Mademoiselle Jeanne, so if you want to change your dress, we will excuse you.’

Jeanne took advantage of this permission; and when she came downstairs again, she found the small party assembled in the drawing-room. Mrs. Seymour was lying on the sofa with her eyes closed. Her husband, carefully wrapped up, was looking dismally out of the window; and Barrington was holding a whispered colloquy with his aunt.

‘Now you may as well make a start,’ said the latter, briskly. ‘Good-bye, all of you; and I shall expect you at dinner, remember, Harry.’ And so the trio went downstairs. But just as they were leaving the house, Miss Barrington’s voice was heard again, from the landing, calling, ‘Harry! Harry!’

‘What’s the matter, Aunt Susan?’

‘I only wanted to remind you that, in case Ernest faints during the performance, there is a nice pump on the cab-stand outside—quite handy.’

‘I must confess,’ observed Mr. Seymour, with a somewhat heightened colour, as the carriage drove away from the door, ‘that I find it a little difficult to be amused by your aunt’s jokes. They may be very funny, but I am unable to see it. Perhaps, though, that may be because I am too advanced in life; for her pleasantries always strike me as being, like the grammars and atlases one sees advertised, specially adapted for the use of schools.’

And with this mild shaft of sarcasm, the ill used Ernest leant back upon the carriage-cushions, and fell into a moody silence. Only once in the course of the afternoon did he address Jeanne again, and that was to recur to the same subject.

‘I am very glad Miss Barrington is not with us, he said.

'If she had been, I should hardly have been able to stand this heat and noise. She means well; but really her ways of going on are too, *too* trying to the nerves. Amelia and I think it our duty to go and see her occasionally; but I can assure you that the duty is a most painful one to me.'

Poor Mr. Seymour had been ridden over rough-shod by Miss Barrington ever since his marriage. He had never attempted to withstand her, and only sometimes, if he were goaded beyond endurance, took refuge in flight from her presence. Amelia, however, was somewhat less submissive; and was, indeed, at this very moment, engaged in taking the terrible Aunt Susan to task in a tone which her husband would never have dared to use.

'I think it is foolish, Aunt Susan,' she was saying. 'Of course you can do as you like; but if you ask my opinion, I must give it, and I think it is foolish.'

'I don't remember having asked your opinion, my dear.'

'You asked me what I thought of the girl.'

'Yes; and you said she was pretty. "Pretty," indeed! Why she is simply one of the most beautiful creatures I ever saw in my life! And upon the strength of her being "pretty," you proceed to call me a fool for having her in the house.'

'I never said that, Aunt Susan. I said I thought it foolish to let her drive about London alone with Harry. And I think so still.'

Mrs. Amelia had a good supply of quiet obstinacy always at command. As she fell back upon the sofa-cushions, and shut her eyes, there came a certain look into her face which Miss Barrington knew well, and which convinced her that further argument would be thrown away upon this stubborn invalid.

'Well, well,' she said, 'it is not a matter of any very great importance. I don't suppose either of them can have got much harm from driving in a hansom from St. Giles's to Bedford Square.'

'Oh, no, very likely not. Only I think, for the girl's own sake, that it is a pity to allow that kind of thing to go on. And Harry is so impulsive.'

'Not he, my dear! Susceptible he may be; but if ever there was a man who habitually looked before he leaped, that man is your brother. A little more impulsiveness would do him no harm.'

‘Well, Aunt Susan, I can do no more than warn you. If any trouble comes of this——’

‘Now, Amelia, I am not going to be lectured. I like having beautiful things and beautiful people about me; and I don’t see why I shouldn’t gratify my taste when I can—and that is not every day, let me tell you. Harry is old enough to take care of himself; and as for Mademoiselle de Mersac, she is engaged to be married. So you see there is no necessity for your fretting yourself into an illness on account of either of them.’

‘Oh, well, if she is engaged, that is another thing. But are you quite sure about it?’

‘Perfectly sure. I am not such a fool as I look, my good Amelia; and I should have thought you might have known me better than to suppose that I should take up so dangerous a pastime as match-making at my time of life.’

This speech was a trifle disingenuous; but it had the desired effect of quieting Mrs. Seymour, who, shortly after this, fell asleep on her sofa, and was left, without any ceremony, by her hostess.

Late that same evening, when Barrington, who had dined in Bedford Square, and had spent a long time in the drawing-room after dinner, had at last said ‘Good-night,’ Miss Barrington took Jeanne’s breath away by saying abruptly, and without any introductory observations—‘If I were you, I should throw over that Frenchman.’

‘I cannot,’ answered Jeanne, in an odd, despairing sort of tone. She had been taken by surprise, and spoke as she would hardly have done if she had had a moment of warning; but the other did not notice—or, at all events, did not seem to notice—anything unusual in her manner.

‘Oh, dear me, yes, you can,’ she rejoined. ‘I’ll tell you what you can’t do: you can’t get rid of a man when once you are married to him—unless, of course, he beats you, and runs away with somebody else’s wife, and even then your Church won’t set you free of him. Well, it’s no business of mine. Good-night, my dear.’

And so this imprudent old woman went off to bed, having succeeded in sowing such a crop of disturbing thoughts as effectually banished sleep from her guest’s pillow for the best part of the night.

Barrington went to his club, and finding Mr. Leigh, as he had expected, in the smoking room, threw himself down in

an easy-chair beside that good-natured gentleman, and said—
‘Leigh, old chap, I want you to come with me to Kew Gardens to-morrow.’

‘Good Lord! Kew Gardens! What on earth for? What do they keep in Kew Gardens? Monkeys and things?’

‘Upon my word, Leigh, you ought to be ashamed of yourself. If you never saw the hot-houses at Kew, it is high time that you should be shown them. I am going there to-morrow, with my aunt and Mademoiselle de Mersac, and you shall come too, and make up the *partie carrée*.’

‘No, I won’t—I’ll be hanged if I will!’ returned Mr. Leigh, with some warmth. ‘Why the deuce should I be put to stew for hours in a greenhouse with an old woman, because you want to carry on one of your interminable flirtations? You may look out for somebody else; I’m not going with you.’

‘Now, now, Leigh, don’t be rude, and don’t lose your temper. It will open your mind to see the Gardens; and as for my aunt, she is universally admitted to be one of the most entertaining old ladies in England.’

‘Hate old ladies, and don’t want my mind opened,’ returned Leigh, concisely, blowing out a cloud of smoke, and watching it drift slowly upwards. ‘How abominably badly ventilated this room is!’

‘Yes, it is unhealthy; and you are here a great deal too much. A little suburban air would do you no end of good. Come now, old man, you might as well be accommodating for once.’

‘Dash it all! I’m always being accommodating; and precious little thanks I get! Now look here, Barrington; if I go with you to that confounded place to-morrow, I shall expect you to leave me in peace afterwards. I am not going to be let in for this kind of thing again. I shouldn’t mind putting myself to inconvenience for a fellow who was awfully hard hit, and wanted a chance of getting a few words alone with a girl, every now and then; but that isn’t your case at all. You have been spending whole days with Mademoiselle de Mersac ever since she came to England. There was nothing on earth, that I can see, to have prevented your proposing to her last winter, in Algiers; there is nothing to prevent your proposing to her now. But I don’t believe you ever will. You prefer to hang on and hang on, settling nothing, and making everybody uncomfortable; and, one of these fine mornings, you’ll find the young lady will marry some one else; and then you’ll raise

a tremendous hullabaloo, and swear she's deserted you, and broken your heart. I call that sort of thing simply sickening.'

'Ah! but you don't quite understand,' observed Barrington, placidly.

And then Mr. Leigh, who was not in the best of tempers, got up, crossed the room, and sat down beside another man.

He kept his promise of joining the party to Kew Gardens on the following day; but he did not, in the sequel, prove true to the determination he had expressed of taking part in no more such expeditions. An appeal to his good nature and friendship was generally enough to send him sighing off to the Crystal Palace, to Richmond Hill, to half-a-dozen places which, at that time of year, were not very attractive in themselves, and for which poor Leigh then and there conceived a hatred which time has never been able to efface.

But the services of this faithful friend were not demanded every day. Barrington was a man of many resources and a very large acquaintance, and, by the aid of one stratagem or another, contrived not only to secure a chaperon for Mademoiselle de Mersac during her daily wanderings, but also to provide that chaperon with a more or less suitable companion. Thus privacy was insured, propriety respected, and the cavillings of Amelia stifled in their birth. By a triumph of diplomacy, Amelia herself was made use of upon more than one occasion. It was Amelia who sat, for over an hour, beside Miss Barrington, at the exhibition of Old Masters, talking about the disputed causes of atrophy, while her brother and Jeanne were at the other end of the gallery, not looking at the pictures at all. It was Amelia again who mounted guard over the same couple during a long wet afternoon in Bedford Square, when Miss Barrington was, as usual, out, and who allowed her attention to be entirely taken off her duties by the conversation of a German physician—a most interesting man, whom Harry had known, some years back, on the Continent, and whom he had thoughtfully invited to meet his sister. Mr. Seymour, too, had to take his share of escort duty, as had many others, none of whom—be it said to the credit of Barrington's adroitness—ever imagined that they were acting in obedience to any other will than their own.

Jeanne, at all events, for one, had no idea of the schemes and plots that were required to bring about those long and delightful interviews with Barrington to which she looked forward every morning on waking, and remembered regretfully

every night before going to sleep. Everything seemed to fall out quite naturally in the manner most agreeable to her; everybody appeared determined that the few days, or weeks, of her stay in London should be made as pleasant for her as possible; her hostess was kindness itself, and Barrington was as devoted as a man could be. It was a cheerful, busy, novel kind of life to her, and she would have been perfectly happy in it, for a time, if only she could have managed to banish all memory of Saint-Luc from her mind.

Meanwhile the natural termination of this little comedy was drawing nearer day by day, and it came at last, as such terminations often do, somewhat abruptly, and without any premeditation on the part of the chief actor. It fell out that, on a certain frosty, starry evening, Barrington and Jeanne found themselves at the entrance of the famous Long Walk in Windsor Park. Under the protection of Mr. and Mrs. Seymour, who by skilful strategy had been cajoled into braving the risks of the expedition, they had been spending the day in the royal borough. They had duly visited the state apartments of the Castle; they had surveyed the wide prospect of river, town, and meadow from the terrace; they had attended the afternoon service at St. George's; and now Barrington had at last persuaded his sister and her husband to seek the warmth and repose which they so much needed in an hotel before setting out upon the return journey to London. There would be just time before the train left for Mademoiselle de Mersac to get a glimpse of the Great Park, and she certainly ought not to leave Windsor without seeing it. As for its being pitch dark, that did not signify in the least; starlight was rather an advantage to wintry scenery. So Jeanne received a reluctant permission to go; and she and her escort were soon standing, with the Castle at their backs, facing the long vista and the equestrian statue at the end of it. That triumph of the sculptor's art was barely distinguishable in the darkness; but the straight line of the three mile avenue, with its row of elms on either side, was clear enough; and Jeanne endeavoured to express that admiration of its effect which she supposed was expected of her.

'It is magnificent in summer, I have no doubt,' said she, with an upward glance at the bare boughs which were swaying and creaking with the rising wind; 'but do you not think it is a little melancholy now?'

'Melancholy? Well, yes, I dare say it is rather,' answered

Barrington, absently. His thoughts were not in the Long Walk at that moment.

‘For myself, I am not very fond of avenues at any time,’ resumed Jeanne. ‘I like much better the winding roads of your English parks, which generally manage to keep you out of sight of the house till you are close upon it. There is something rather depressing in driving for three miles in a straight line, with the object of your drive before you all the time, and growing bigger and bigger as you approach it. One feels as though one had a task to accomplish, and one longs to get to the end of it. In France there is hardly a château but has its avenue; not so long as this, certainly, still long enough, very often, to seem interminable. Most of them are bordered by lime trees; but some have poplars, which is terrible. It is impossible to imagine anything more gloomy than a French château during the autumn and winter. Most of us, you know, do not make our homes in the country, as you do. It is only those who cannot afford to go away who remain on their estates all the year round; and when the summer is over, and their guests have gone away, they usually dismiss a number of their servants. Then the avenue is deep with fallen leaves, which nobody takes the trouble to sweep away; at the end of it is the house, generally half shut up; everything is silence, and sleep, and decay. I do not know how I could bear to live in such a place!’ she concluded, with a shudder.

Barrington had never been told before that M. de Saint-Luc was the owner of a château; but he felt sure of it now.

‘I don’t think,’ said he, ‘that you ever will live in such a place.’

‘How can you tell?’

‘At all events, nothing obliges you to do so.’

She made no reply.

‘Where would you like best to live—in England or in Algeria? What I should prefer would be to spend the summer and autumn, and perhaps just a little bit of the winter, in England; then to go to Algiers, and remain there till May, when it would be time to do a few weeks of Paris and London.’

‘Yes, that would be perfect.’

‘I should think it perfect if you were with me.’

These last words were spoken in a very low voice—not too low, however, to reach their destination; for Barrington was standing very close to Jeanne at the time, and, as he stopped

speaking, his hand somehow found its way into hers. And so, for a couple of seconds or so, they remained, neither of them showing any inclination to speak. Then Jeanne started, and drew back.

‘We shall miss the train. Let us go,’ she said, in a rather unsteady voice.

‘Not till you have told me with your own lips that you love me, Jeanne—not till you have promised that we shall never part again in our lives, and that you will not allow anyone or anything to come between us any more.’

The floodgates of Barrington’s speech were loosed now, and set free a torrent of glib words. Having at last made up his mind to speak plainly, he appreciated to the full the exquisite pleasure of pouring his love-tale into Jeanne’s own ears; and, as he was not hampered by any of the doubts which usually impede the eloquence of lovers, his avowal progressed without any hitch, and was quite a model of poetical and graceful diction. It was all such plain sailing! Long ago he had been perfectly well aware, in his heart, that Jeanne loved him; it only remained now for him to declare his own passion; and, as he did so, he could see, even in that dim light, that her face softened, that a smile hovered about her lips—he almost thought he could detect a gathering moisture in her eyes.

Great, then, was his astonishment and consternation at the answer which fell upon his ears when he had finished speaking.

‘Mr. Barrington,’ said Jeanne, in her gravest and most composed manner, ‘I am very grateful to you for all the kind things you have said, but what you wish for cannot be. It is impossible.’

Had her suitor been a little less prolix, she would probably have replied to him after a different fashion; but he had given her time to think, and to remember both her engagement to Saint-Luc and its cause.

‘You forget that I am not free,’ she said.

‘Is that all? Is it only that?’

‘It should have been enough, I think, to prevent you from speaking as you did just now.’

‘Oh, but that is ridiculous—it really is. I know that you are engaged, in a sort of way, to that fellow, but I also know that you don’t care a brass farthing for him; and you are not yet married to him, thank God! If you do not love me, you have only to say so, and no harm will have been done; but if

you do, you will be inflicting the greatest injury in your power upon me and upon yourself—yes, and upon Saint-Luc too—by concealing it.’

Barrington’s tone was hardly that of a suppliant. All his life long it had been his habit, if he did not at once get what he wanted, to order it rather than beg for it; and he was displaying this tendency now more plainly than he was aware of.

Jeanne, however, scarcely noticed this, being fully taken up with her own perplexity and trouble. In her heart she was rather of Barrington’s opinion, and was inclined to think that she ought to tell him all the truth; but then there was that unfortunate debt of Léon’s which must be spoken of first, and, at the moment, she could not bring herself to do this. So, having no words at command by means of which she might make Barrington understand that she wanted time to think before giving him a direct answer, she cut the knot of the difficulty in a very simple manner. She turned, and walked back towards the town as fast as she could go.

Barrington could only follow her; and, as he caught her up, he did manage to whisper a few pleas and remonstrances. But she answered never a word, and he soon subsided into silence; for how is it possible to make love while hurrying, at the rate of a good four miles an hour, through streets illumined by gas-lamps and lighted shop-windows, and tolerably full of foot-passengers? Barrington gave it up; but he was highly incensed, and not at all inclined to put up with the scolding which his sister was even now rehearsing in anticipation of his return to the White Hart.

‘Really, this is *too* bad!’ cried that injured lady, when the delinquents made their appearance. ‘Harry, are you aware that you have made us miss the train, and that we shall very likely have to stay here all night, without so much as a hair-brush or a clean collar among us?’

‘Nonsense, Amelia! There is another train in half-an-hour, and you will be home by dinner-time. Don’t make a fuss about nothing.’

Mrs. Seymour was scared into silence by the unexpected sternness of this rejoinder; but when she was once more at home with her husband, she expressed her opinion of Barrington’s behaviour in no measured terms.

‘I believe he made us late purposely,’ she said; ‘and as for that horrid girl, I shall not be taken in by her a second time.’

This morning she was trying to make friends with me, and I really began to think that I had done her an injustice, and was sorry I had written to the Ashleys about it at all. But now I am very glad that I did; and I do hope that they will manage between them to bring Harry to his senses.'

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MISS BARRINGTON'S PATIENCE IS TRIED.

MISS BARRINGTON had a small room on the ground floor of her house in Bedford Square, in which she usually spent her mornings, and which was firmly closed against all visitors, save such as came upon matters of business. It was here that she received her lawyer from time to time; it was here that she cross-questioned and brow-beat the sturdy beggars, the meek, limp gentlewomen in distress, and the much less patient clergymen who applied to her almost daily for alms; here, too, it was that, when her many occupations allowed her half-an-hour or so of idleness, she was in the habit of enjoying her newspaper or her novel without fear of needless interruption.

She was sitting in this room on the morning after the day of the Windsor expedition, warming her feet before the fire, and reading in the *Times* about the terms of the Capitulation of Paris, and the preparations for the election of a National Assembly, when the butler, entering with an apologetic air, announced that Mrs. Ashley was waiting in the hall, and desired an interview.

'Mrs. Ashley?' repeated Miss Barrington, in some surprise. 'Well, show her into the drawing-room.'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am; but I was to say as Mrs. Ashley wished most particular to see you alone.'

'Bother!' muttered Miss Barrington. 'Ask her to come in here, then,' she added aloud.

A rustling of silk skirts was heard from without—a quick, agitated footfall; and then our old friend appeared through the open door, and advanced rapidly towards the fire-place, dropping her umbrella, her veil, and a couple of brown paper parcels on the way.

'My dear Miss Barrington, how are you? I am so ashamed

of intruding into your private room in this way ! I know you dislike it so very much ; and no wonder, I'm sure, having so many business matters, and that kind of thing, to attend to as you have ; and I always say that one cannot give one's mind properly to any subject if one is always expecting somebody to come running in and distracting one's attention ; and over and over again I have begged Mr. Ashley to let me have one room in the house where, at least, everybody should be obliged to knock before coming in. That would give one a little time, you know ; but he won't see the necessity for it, though he has his own study, where he keeps nothing but guns and fishing-rods, and such things, and never, by any chance, opens a book——'

'And what has brought you up to London ?' inquired Miss Barrington, perceiving that this speech was likely to be indefinitely prolonged.

'Oh, a multitude of things ! Shopping, you know, and—and the dentist. I ought to have had my teeth seen to long ago. And, oh, *could* you recommend me a really good dentist, who is not absolutely extortionate in his charges ? Some of them are so shameful—or rather, so shameless ! There is a poor man near us at Holmhurst—the curate of the next parish, in fact—a very nice, gentlemanly young fellow, but has lost his teeth early in life—no fault of his, I'm sure—and the other day he had to get a false set ; and he thought he would go to one of the so called cheap men, and ——'

'Yes, yes,' broke in Miss Barrington, 'I know. You told me about him once before. He swallowed the entire set in the middle of the Litany, didn't he?—or something of that kind. Was it to get information from me about a dentist that you came here to-day ?'

'N—no ; not that alone, answered Mrs. Ashley, beginning to look rather uncomfortable.

'I only asked because, from what the servant said, I rancied you must have some reason for wishing to see me in this room.'

'Well, yes, so I have. It isn't exactly what you could call a matter of business, you know ; only——'

'Call it anything you like—what's in a name ? But let us hear what it is.'

'It is about Jeanne. It has been so very kind of you, dear Miss Barrington, to have her here ; and seeing London, and the change, and all, must have done her an immensity of

good. But everything must have an end, and don't you think she had better go back with me to-morrow ?'

'Certainly not. She is quite happy where she is, and I shall not think of letting her go.'

'Well, but, Miss Barrington,' began Mrs. Ashley, hesitatingly, 'you see she was placed under my care, and——'

'And you don't think my house a safe place for her to stay in, I suppose. Much obliged to you.'

'Oh, Miss Barrington, *please !*' cried poor Mrs. Ashley, with an agonised vision of forfeited legacies rising before her eyes. 'You know I could not possibly mean that. Only everybody's house is unsafe at times—at least for particular people ; and just now, Jeanne—Mr. Barrington—Well, she begged me not to mention her name ; but really, how is one to help mentioning names ? The truth is, I have had a most disagreeable and alarming note from Mrs. Seymour.'

'Give it to me,' said Miss Barrington, majestically. And, after a moment's hesitation, Mrs. Ashley obeyed.

'Oho ! So Amelia takes upon herself to write and tell you that I am encouraging a "disgraceful flirtation" between your niece and Harry, and that you had better take the girl away, unless you want her to spoil your daughter's prospects. And you have come up to town in order to brandish this silly and impertinent document in my face !'

'Oh, but I didn't do that—I really didn't,' pleaded Mrs. Ashley, much alarmed. 'You asked me to show it to you, you know ; and what could I do ? I own I was a good deal put out when it came ; but I dare say, after all, there isn't a word of truth in it.'

'I don't know why there shouldn't be,' returned Miss Barrington, composedly. 'That is, as regards the substance of it. I don't admit having encouraged flirtations, or anything of the sort, myself.'

'But if that is the case, Miss Barrington—if there really is anything of that kind going on, hadn't I better take Jeanne away at once, before it goes too far to be stopped. Helen's prospects——'

'Helen's prospects don't include a marriage with Harry, I suspect,' interrupted Miss Barrington, bluntly. 'I am sorry for your disappointment, but it can't be helped. Men will be obstinate, you see. I brought Harry to the water for you ; but I couldn't make him drink, could I !'

'Oh, but this is too dreadful ! After all that has passed,

that our plans should be upset in this way ! And by Jeanne, too, of all people, who is engaged herself.'

'Ah, that I have nothing to do with. And mind you, I am not going to make myself responsible for any of Harry's vagaries. I don't say that he is going to marry your niece, or even that he is flirting with her ; but I think it is only fair to tell you that, to the best of my belief, there is not the remotest chance of his marrying Helen.'

'It is very hard !' exclaimed poor Mrs. Ashley, beginning to whimper—'very hard, I must say, after things being all but settled. And that Jeanne, to whom we have tried to show every kindness, should be the one to do us this injury ! It does seem hard. I don't want to say anything unkind, but one can't help being reminded of the man in *Æsop's Fables* who warmed the snake in his bosom—so nasty of him ! I wonder whether people actually did such things in those days—and it almost tempts one to say one will never trust anybody again. How I am to break this at home Heaven only knows !'

'Come, come,' said Miss Barrington, not unkindly, 'it isn't worth crying about. Helen is a charming girl, and will make a good marriage yet, you may be sure ; and when you come to think of it, Harry is no such very great catch. I have lots of young men among my acquaintances much better off than he ; and if you will let me take charge of Helen next season, she shall have her pick of them. Things might be worse, remember. It is not as if she had been in love with Harry.'

'Oh, but I am not sure——'

'Now, Mrs. Ashley, you know perfectly well that there never was anything of the kind between them. Helen will be a little mortified and disappointed at first ; but I am going to play the part of the fairy godmother, and put everything straight for her in a trice. Take my word for it, the day will come when you will be very thankful to think that our plan fell through.'

After this fashion Miss Barrington comforted her visitor, restored her to something like good spirits, and finally, though not without some gentle persuasion, got rid of her.

'That abandoned Amelia !' she muttered, as the door closed behind Mrs. Ashley. 'I'll be even with her for this.' And then she returned to the Capitulation of Paris.

But Miss Barrington was not to be allowed to inform her mind upon current events that morning. Hardly had she found the place where she had been interrupted in her reading,

when another knock at the door announced the approach of a second intruder; and immediately after it, Mr. Seymour shuffled into the room, looking very unhappy and not a little apprehensive.

'Now, before you say another word, Ernest,' began Miss Barrington, sternly, 'have the goodness to answer me one question. Have you come here to see me of your own accord, or are you sent by Amelia?'

'I should not have thought of disturbing you on my own account,' answered Mr. Seymour, in a melancholy voice. 'I never interfere with other people's affairs; and, besides, I caught a chill yesterday, and I feel that my liver is congested, and that I ought by rights to be in bed. But Amelia wished me to speak to you about——'

'Then you may as well go home again, and go to bed, and nurse your liver; for I don't intend to listen to you.'

'Really, Aunt Susan——'

'Really, Ernest, I am not going to stand any more of Amelia's nonsense; and you may tell her so, with my love. If she has anything to say, let her come here and say it; but I won't have her sending me impertinent messages through you.'

'But you haven't heard what it is yet.'

'I know, though. Bless you, I have had Mrs. Ashley here the whole morning, and only got rid of her by almost thrusting her out of the door. I don't know what you all expect of me; but I know what some of you will get, if you go on worrying me as you are doing.'

And Miss Barrington assumed an air of such ferocity that Mr. Seymour instinctively clutched his hat, and backed away from her.

Upon this, she immediately extended her hand to him.

'Good-bye, Ernest,' she said. 'Take great care of yourself, and tell Amelia that, any day she likes to come here, I shall be ready for her. Now, I won't detain you any longer.'

'And upon my word and honour,' said this luckless envoy, giving an account of his mission to Amelia, on his return home, 'I believe that, if I had lingered another minute, that aunt of yours would have kicked me out of the house.'

If Mr. Seymour could have so far forgotten the delicate state of his health as to open one of the windows of the four-wheeled cab which bore him away from Bedford Square, and to cast a backward glance at the house he had just left, he would have

been gratified by the sight of his brother-in-law alighting from a hansom before it.

'Oh, it's you, is it?' said Miss Barrington, gruffly, when this third visitor invaded her sanctum. 'And what do *you* want, I wonder?'

'Aunt Susan, I want to have a talk with you. I am in trouble.'

'Is it money?' inquired Miss Barrington, blandly.

'No; it isn't money.'

'Have you developed an internal complaint?'

'Good heavens, no! I hope not.'

'Then, of course, it must be love. Proceed, my dear Harry. I like listening to love tales; and I have no doubt I shall be able to give you a good deal of sound advice as to the best mode of gaining the lady's affections.'

'I believe you know all about it,' said Barrington, suspiciously.

'No! You don't mean to say that you give me credit for such wonderful penetration as that! Well, perhaps it may save time if I tell you at once that I do know all about it, and so does everybody else. When people make themselves as conspicuous as you and she have chosen to do, they can hardly expect to escape notice. Mrs. Ashley has been here this morning to protest against your conduct. So has Ernest Seymour, acting as representative of Amelia. I only wish the three of you had arrived at the same moment. What fun it would have been!'

'Ah, you may laugh,' returned Barrington, in an aggrieved voice, 'but it is no laughing matter for me, I can tell you. What a nuisance it is that people won't be content to mind their own business! And what earthly right has Mrs. Ashley to protest against anything I may do? I never heard of anything so coolly impertinent.'

'Ah, that's the way of the world. A few months ago you would have allowed that she had some reason for being interested in your proceedings. But we needn't mind poor Mrs. Ashley now. What is it that you want me to do for you? For I presume you want something?'

'I told you what I wanted—only to have a talk with you. I should like to have your opinion about it all.'

'What do you wish me to deliver an opinion upon, Harry? Upon the advisability of your marrying Jeanne de Mersac, or upon your chance of succeeding with her?'

‘Well, upon both points. I should never have supposed that you would have approved of such a match ; but it seems that you do—at least, you have done your best to bring it about—and I wish you would gratify my curiosity by telling me why. I never was more astonished in my life than when I heard that you had asked Mademoiselle de Mersac to stay with you. I always fancied you were bent upon marrying me to Helen Ashley, who, I must confess, would have been a more suitable person from your point of view.’

‘You don’t know much about my point of view, I dare say,’ observed Miss Barrington. ‘I have shifted it about a good deal in the course of my life, trying to get face to face with things, and to see them as they are; but I doubt whether I have ever quite succeeded. One can but do one’s best. When I was convinced that you really did love this girl, I did not wish you to marry anyone but her. I have always thought that a love-match would be the saving of you. With Helen you would have got on well enough ; but you would have been perpetually away from home ; and you would have become more and more selfish as you grew older ; and then I should have been in constant terror of your falling in love with somebody else, and perhaps running away with her. All I trust is that you will be as true to Jeanne as I am sure she will be to you.’

‘You need have no fear on that score,’ answered Barrington, with decision. ‘I have never loved anyone in my life but her ; and I shall never love anyone else.’

‘Ah ! Well, I suppose you had better go upstairs now, and tell her so. You will find her in the drawing-room.’

‘Don’t be in such a hurry, Aunt Susan. I have told her so already, as it happens ; and that is why I am in such trouble and perplexity at this moment.’

‘Do you mean to say that you have proposed to her, and been refused ?’

‘Not exactly that ; but something very like it. I spoke plainly to her last night, at Windsor, and she wouldn’t listen to me. She said that what I asked for was an impossibility—or words to that effect. I never was more taken aback in my life.’

‘Ha, ha !—so I should imagine. You naturally expected that she would rush into your arms. How disappointing it must have been for you ! You can but try again though. Surely it is not in feminine nature to refuse a second offer of your hand and heart.’

‘My dear Aunt Susan, you are perfectly welcome to laugh at me, and I hope you enjoy it. Sneers of that kind won’t make me in the least angry, because *il n’y a que la vérité qui blesse*, and I do not happen to be the coxcomb that you try to make me out. I believe that Jeanne de Mersac loves me; and if you choose to think me conceited for so believing, I can’t help it. I am not going to waste my breath and your time in proving—as I could, if I chose—that there is no conceit at all in such an assumption. What I want to know, and what I came here to ask you, is whether you will use your influence with her on my behalf. Will you try to make her understand that it is an absurdly mistaken idea of duty that binds her to that Saint-Luc fellow? She will not listen to me, because I cannot pretend to be a disinterested adviser! but if you were to speak, I think it might have some effect upon her.’

‘And so this was the errand upon which you came, was it?’ said Aunt Susan, with an odd look. ‘No, no, my good friend, you are not quite such a fool as that. What you did come for was to get some one to back up your faint resolution. Don’t interrupt me. I believe you love the girl, and you can’t help your temperament, I suppose; but I know that, if I had chosen, I could have got you to leave this house this morning without breathing another word to her about marriage.’

‘Upon my word, this is going rather too far!’ exclaimed Barrington, starting to his feet, and showing signs of losing his temper at last. ‘You have no right to assume that I should behave like a blackguard under any circumstances. I am not one of those people who act upon first impulses, and I dare say I often change my mind; but when once I have pledged myself, I do not go back from my word. I should never have asked Mademoiselle de Mersac to marry me if I had had any thought of backing out of it afterwards; and now, whether I am accepted or refused, I shall always remain true to her.’

‘Well, well,’ sighed Miss Barrington, ‘I hope so, I’m sure. I hope I haven’t been making an old fool of myself—but one never knows. If you don’t go upstairs now, you will hardly have time to get through what you have to say before the luncheon-bell rings. Please go, and leave me in peace; I want to read my paper.’

But Barrington would not go yet. His aunt had not been far wrong in her assertion that his visit to her had been prompted rather by a craving for moral support than for any want of actual help or advice. He wished to be assured that

this contemplated marriage would not be looked upon as an act of folly by the world. He wanted to be patted on the back—to be contradicted a little—to have the opportunity of demonstrating that he knew what he was about, and that he loved not only well, but wisely. And Miss Barrington let him have his say, laying down her newspaper again, and hearing him out with great patience to the end.

‘What an extraordinary character yours is, Harry!’ she exclaimed, at length. ‘I don’t suppose there is another man in the world who would have spent half-an-hour in haranguing an old woman about his undying love, while the object of it was in another room close by, alone, and waiting for him.’

Barrington laughed. He was quite himself again by this time, and wondered how he could have felt so uneasy in spirit as he had done earlier in the morning.

‘I am going up to the drawing-room now,’ he said. ‘I suppose I shall see you again by-and-by.’

He opened the door as he spoke, but did not pass through it; for, while he had been talking, yet another visitor had been demanding a private interview with Miss Barrington, and was at this moment announced by the butler.

‘Mr. Ashley.’ It was more than Miss Barrington’s patience could stand.

‘This was wanting!’ she ejaculated audibly. Then she got up, and said, in a resolute voice—

‘How are you, Mr. Ashley? Now, please, before you open your statement, permit me to say distinctly and finally that I decline to be badgered in my own den. All the morning through, one person after another has been taking my room by storm, and trying, in every conceivable way, to put me into a rage. Up to this moment I have borne with it all. But to everything there must be an end; and I have never set myself up as a rival to Job. I suppose you know that your wife has been here already?’

‘I haven’t seen my wife,’ answered Mr. Ashley. ‘I have only just arrived from Holmhurst.’

And then Miss Barrington perceived that something had gone wrong. Mr. Ashley’s naturally loud voice was lowered almost to a whisper; his placid countenance wore an expression of deep solemnity and concern, and his forehead was wrinkled into a portentous frown.

‘I don’t know what you are talking about,’ he said. ‘I

want to see Jane; I have some bad news for her. Her brother is dying, I am afraid.'

'Good God!' exclaimed Barrington; 'you don't mean that.'

'Yes; a telegram came for her this morning,' replied Mr. Ashley, feeling in his pocket for the paper. 'I guessed what it might be, and I thought it better to open it than to send it on by post. Here it is, if you like to read it. I wish one of you would break it to the poor girl, I'm such a bad hand at anything of that sort.'

Barrington took the telegram, which was from Saint-Luc, and was dated from an hotel in Geneva. 'Please come at once. Léon is very ill of fever. There is still hope.' That was all; and the words struck Barrington as being needlessly few and curt. He read it aloud, and then said: 'Hang the fellow! he might have spent another shilling or two in sending some details.'

'Nonsense!' returned Miss Barrington; 'one can't break things gently by telegram. Go and tell her, Harry, as quickly as you can, and I will look up the trains.'

'Hadn't you better do it?' suggested Barrington, who had a horror of painful scenes. 'A woman understands better——'

'Very well. Give me the telegram then. And be so good as to ring the bell, and say that I shall want my maid to pack up my things and be ready to start on a journey to-night. I can't let Jeanne go alone. You will find a foreign Bradshaw somewhere. Just make out the quickest route to Geneva, will you, while I am upstairs.'

Barrington obeyed his aunt's instructions mechanically. He rang the bell, and gave the necessary orders to the butler; he got out Bradshaw, and a slip of paper, and jotted down the hours of arrival and departure of the express trains; he listened to the mournful comments and surmises of Mr. Ashley, and by degrees came to a sense of the calamity that had happened, and of what some of its probable consequences would be. He was very sorry for Jeanne, very sorry for Léon, whom he had always liked, and he was also exceedingly sorry for himself. If only he had gone up to the drawing-room ten minutes earlier, instead of remaining to talk sentiment to an unsympathetic listener, how different would have been his position with regard to Jeanne at that moment! Had his offer been accepted, he, too, might have gone to Switzerland with her; but now he felt that

if he were allowed to bid her farewell, it would be as much as he could expect of her in this time of her sorrow, and certainly there could be no possibility of his carrying out the purpose which had brought him to Bedford Square that morning. It was very bad luck, he could not help thinking. His heart sank at the idea of parting from Jeanne. He dreaded the long separation that might be in store for them; he dreaded the effect that the loss of her brother might have upon her mind; most of all, he dreaded her return to the companionship of Saint-Luc.

‘Nothing more miserably unfortunate could possibly have happened!’ he ejaculated aloud, forgetful of the presence of Mr. Ashley, who, however, did not seem to consider the expression too strong a one.

‘Yes, yes,’ he agreed, wagging his head dolefully—‘terrible thing!—terrible! Poor young fellow! To go through the whole campaign without a scratch, and then get bowled over by fever at the last minute. It does seem hard lines! He was with Boubaki’s army, you know, and, of course, crossed the Swiss frontier the other day, with the rest of them. They seemed to have died like flies, those unlucky beggars!—more from cold than disease though, I fancy. Poor Jane will be dreadfully cut up about this. Very kind of your aunt to propose to take her to Geneva—most kind, I must say. I had been thinking I ought to go myself; but there wouldn’t be much use in adding another person to the party now, would there?’

‘None whatever, I should say. I would offer to go—to look after my aunt, you know—only I feel convinced that she would not hear of it. There is no difficulty about the journey, and I think when people are in trouble, it is kindness to leave them to themselves as much as possible.’

Whether this were meant as a gentle hint to Mr. Ashley or not, that excellent gentleman accepted it as such. He got up, took his hat, stick, and gloves, and said with a certain air of relief—

‘Yes, to be sure—yes, you are right there, Barrington, I think. I don’t see that I can do any good by staying here, and I may very likely be in the way. Will you bid your aunt good-bye for me, and thank her very much for her kindness? And, if you get a chance, you might just say a kind word or two to Jane; I shouldn’t like her to think I had forgotten her. Well, good morning to you, Barrington. See you again soon, I dare say.’

And so presently the street-door was shut behind Mr. Ashley.

After a time, Miss Barrington came down, looking very serious and subdued.

‘Jeanne takes it with wonderful courage,’ she said. ‘She has gone to pack up, and she talks cheerfully, and says she is certain her brother will recover; but she is looking like death herself, poor child, all the time. We start to-night, of course. At what time does the train go? Half-past eight?—very well. I think, perhaps, you had better go away now, Harry. You might meet us at the station and see us off, if you like.’

‘I wish I could go with you!’

‘Yes, but I am afraid that would hardly do. I will telegraph to you as soon as we arrive, and will write all particulars by the first post.’

With this promise Barrington was fain to be content. He went away very sorrowfully, and spent the rest of the day alone in his rooms, dining early, so as to be at the station before the travellers. Amid the hurry and confusion of taking tickets and registering luggage, he saw them only for a few moments, and could but find time to whisper a word or two of sympathy and encouragement to Jeanne. He had intended to beg her to write to him; but at the last moment he felt reluctant to obtrude himself upon her, and only said, with a sigh, ‘I wonder how long it will be before I hear of you again!’

‘Miss Barrington will be sure to let you know as soon as we reach our journey’s end,’ answered Jeanne.

Her voice was as clear as usual; and when she gave her ungloved hand to Barrington, just before the train started, he noticed that it was quite steady and cool. Knowing her as well as he did by that time, he did not misjudge her on account of her outward serenity; but he would certainly have been better pleased if she had given him to understand, were it ever so faintly, that it gave her some pain to leave him.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

BY THE LAKE OF GENEVA.

JEANNE and Miss Barrington, arriving at the Geneva railway-station weary and dispirited, after an unbroken journey from London, were rather alarmed when a servant from the Hôtel de l'Ecu, having informed himself of their identity, took off his cap, and produced a note addressed to Mademoiselle de Mersac. It was so far more likely, they felt, to bring them bad news than good. But Jeanne, tearing open the envelope with cold hands, found to her relief that it only contained a line or two from Saint-Luc, apologising for his inability to meet her at the station. Until her arrival, he said, he did not like to leave his charge, who, however, was no worse—if anything a shade better—than when he had sent off his telegram.

‘So far, so good!’ cried Miss Barrington, reviving a little when this intelligence was read out to her. ‘Now, don’t let us hurry off at once, but wait for our luggage, and have baths and breakfast before we attempt to do anything more. If you are going to help in nursing your brother, you must not begin by being tired out.’

But Jeanne’s patience was hardly equal to the following of this sound advice. She did, perforce, remain at the station till her luggage was delivered to her; but as soon as she reached the hotel, she left Miss Barrington to order what she pleased in the way of rooms and food, and, begging one of the waiters to show her her brother’s room, followed him upstairs.

The man knocked gently at the door of a bedroom on the first floor, and immediately Saint-Luc came out; and, taking Jeanne by the hand, led her into a small adjoining sitting-room.

‘Léon is certainly a little better,’ said he. ‘The doctor is more hopeful about him to-day than he was yesterday, and if he begins to mend now all may yet be well. I trust I did not do wrong in telegraphing for you.’

‘Wrong! no, indeed! If you had not telegraphed I should never have forgiven—I mean it was very kind of you to do so. Now, I must see him.’

‘One moment, mademoiselle. I thought you ought to be at hand, in case things came to the worst; but, unless you in-

sist upon it, it would perhaps be better for you not to go into your brother's room. You have not yet heard what his illness is.'

'You told me it was fever. But it does not in the least signify; I have no fear of infection.'

'It is scarlet fever.'

'Nothing worse than that!' exclaimed Jeanne, much relieved.

'That may be bad enough sometimes. And it is very infectious.'

'Not until the patient is recovering, I believe. But I should certainly claim the right to nurse him, whatever might be his disease.'

'I expected as much; only it was my duty to warn you. Mademoiselle, you must not be too much shocked when you see poor Léon. He has been very ill, and is greatly altered—not by the fever alone. He would not have succumbed to it so easily as he has done if he had not been thoroughly shaken and weakened by the last weeks of the war.'

Jeanne glanced at Saint-Luc, and noticed that he too was much changed. He was as thin as a greyhound; there was a plentiful sprinkling of grey in his black hair and moustache; his cheeks were hollow, his face tanned, weather-beaten, and scored with deep lines; and in his eyes, which seemed to have doubled in size, there was a weary, patient look which Jeanne had never seen there before.

'You are not well yourself, monsieur,' she said, gently.

'There is nothing the matter with me; I am by no means as ill as I look. But one does not go through such a march as that last one of ours without bearing some traces of it afterwards. It has killed many of us, and turned many more into old men. And I personally have had a great deal of trouble and unhappiness lately; my poor regiment all but annihilated—half my friends killed, or dead of fatigue and exposure—disaster following disaster—our miserable retreat into Switzerland—and, to crown all, this illness of Léon's. That is the worst thing that has happened to me yet. All through our misfortunes my one consolation has been that he was still well and unhurt, and my one hope was that I should be able to restore him to you safe and sound at the end of the war. But it was not to be.'

There was an odd, pathetic break in the man's voice which both touched and surprised Jeanne, and made her involuntarily

draw nearer to him. 'Dear M. de Saint-Luc,' she said, 'I know you have been all that is good and kind to Léon, and I never can thank you enough for all that you have done for him; but neither you nor anyone else could have kept him from catching a fever.'

'No. All we can do now is to pray for him.'

'You do sometimes pray, then, now?'

'*Ma foi*, yes,' answered Saint-Luc, with a faint smile. 'I have looked on at so many horrors and so much suffering of late, that I have come to see that there must be another life after this. They tell me that that is not a logical conclusion; but if it be a true one, I can afford to do without the logic. You told me once that you would pray for me; and sometimes I have fancied that your prayers were bearing some fruit. But I must not talk of myself any more. I will take you at once to see Léon; but you must eat and rest before you can possibly be fit to begin nursing him.'

And without further preface, Saint-Luc led the way into the small room where poor Léon lay, wasted to a shadow of his former self by privation and illness, and muttering incoherently as he tossed to and fro in the delirium of the fever.

By the bedside was seated a white-capped Sister of Charity, whom Jeanne could not, at first, help regarding with a slight twinge of jealousy, but to whose presence she became quite reconciled when Saint-Luc spoke of her in terms of the deepest gratitude.

'But for the good Sister there,' said he, 'I do not know whether we should have kept our patient alive till now. You and I, mademoiselle, are willing to do our best; but neither of us, I suppose, knows much more of the art of nursing the sick than we do of the study of medicine, and if we were left to ourselves we should be making mistakes every hour.'

Jeanne saw that her first impulse, which had been to dispense with this stranger's services, and to undertake the whole care of her brother herself, had been guessed; and saw also that it had been a foolish one. Before twenty-four hours were over, she had fully recognised her own lack of skill, and was thankful enough to have an experienced person at hand to give her directions.

For many days Léon hovered between life and death. Long after the fever had left him, the doctors shook their heads over his case, and would not say that they considered him out of danger; and though Jeanne exhausted herself in efforts to get

a plain answer out of these grave gentlemen, it is needless to say that she did not succeed. The young man's whole system had received a shock, it appeared ; and there were complications—not necessarily dangerous ones—still such as must give cause for some anxiety—&c., &c. But in the end the complications disappeared, or were conquered ; and then it remained only to get up the invalid's strength.

And so, in the early spring days, when the buds of the chestnut trees were beginning to show tufts of green, and the snow was melting off the lower mountains, and shadows of detached clouds sailed over the ruffled blue surface of the lake, a party of four persons was to be seen, nearly every day, getting into the carriage which was waiting for them at the door of the Hôtel de l'Écu. First, a tall, emaciated young man would be assisted down the steps and into the carriage by his three companions, who then proceeded to skirmish round him, placing pillows under his head, covering him up to the nose with rugs, and carrying out their several plans for his comfort without any regard whatever to the feeble protestations which he apparently raised from time to time. Having arranged matters to their satisfaction, two ladies, an elderly and a young one, would take their places respectively beside and opposite to the invalid ; while the fourth person, a bronzed, grizzle-headed gentleman, would scramble up on to the box. Then the heavy vehicle would move away at a slow jog-trot, followed by the eyes of the neighbours, who had soon grown to know the strangers well by sight, and to feel a sympathetic interest in their doings.

The driver had very little trouble, at first, with these quiet, accommodating people, who allowed themselves to be guided entirely by his wishes with regard to the question of destination, and were driven out, day after day, along the most level roads, without raising any protest against the monotony of their routes. But as the weather grew warmer, and the sick gentleman stronger, they became restive, and insisted upon being taken to higher ground—to the slopes of the Grand Salève, or to the hills on the northern side of the lake, whence they could get a peep of the chain of Mont Blanc ; and if, in the course of their drive, they espied a likely spot in one of the sunny meadows that lay on either side of the way, they would not unfrequently call a halt, and, carrying off the rugs and carriage-cushions, would improvise out of their materials a couch for their charge, would group themselves around him,

and so linger on by the hour together, quite forgetful of the patient coachman and horses who were awaiting their good pleasure by the roadside.

At such times as these Miss Barrington commonly rose, after a few minutes, leaving Léon enthroned between Saint-Luc and Jeanne, and wandered away by herself. Poor Miss Barrington had been growing more and more uneasy in her mind ever since the first days of her sojourn in Geneva. She began to wish most heartily that she had not interfered with the course of Jeanne's destiny, and to dread the consequences of her rashness. She consoled herself a little by thinking that, when all was said and done, Jeanne was in love with Barrington, and not with Saint-Luc. 'But, dear me!' she would often sigh, when she was thinking matters over in the seclusion of her own room, 'how is it possible that she can have made such a mistake! Harry is a very good fellow in his way; but he is no more to be compared with this M. de Saint-Luc than a dickey-bird is with an eagle. And the worst of it is that the man simply adores her—it is easy to see that. Harry will never adore anybody. He will break Jeanne's heart, I dare say, before he has done with her; and, in the meantime, she will have broken the heart of the other lover. A pretty mess we have made of it all between us!'

Saint-Luc had achieved a facile conquest of Miss Barrington. His handsome face and his subdued, grave manners made the more impression upon her because her nephew's description of the Vicomte had led her to fancy him a very different person. She had expected to meet a smirking, gesticulating little Frenchman, with a waxed moustache, who would be always laying his hand on his heart, and ogling and flirting, and getting in everybody's way; and the actual man was so very unlike this imaginary presentment of him, that she would have been predisposed in his favour, even if his devotion to Jeanne, his watchful care of Léon, and his courtesy towards herself had not quite won her heart. Encountering one another constantly by Léon's bedside, and discussing his chances of recovery together, at other times, more freely than they could do when Jeanne was present, these two became fast friends. Saint-Luc's English vocabulary was somewhat limited, and not adapted for indiscriminate use—being composed chiefly of pithy expressions learnt from Anglo-Parisian grooms and jockeys in days gone by—but Miss Barrington brushed up her French, and, before long, she and Saint-Luc were upon a footing of perfect

mutual comprehension and esteem. And now Miss Barrington's conscience troubled her sorely in that she was playing a traitor's part towards this kind and unsuspecting gentleman ; for almost every post brought her letters from Harry, asking endless questions about Saint-Luc and his relations with Jeanne—questions which she had promised to answer, and did answer—feeling, all the time, that she was no better than a spy in a friendly camp. And so, as the days went on, she became more and more taciturn, and would often, as has been said, wander away from the three younger people, by whom her absence was scarcely noticed.

Nor was Miss Barrington the only firm friend whom Saint-Luc earned for himself during the long weeks of Léon's illness and convalescence. If Jeanne's heart had been hard enough to hold out against the spectacle of this stalwart soldier converted into a sick nurse, and watching unweariedly, night and day, in her brother's room—if she could have withstood his gentleness, his thought for others, and his determination neither to give up hope himself, nor to let those about him do so, her obduracy must have been vanquished when Léon grew strong enough to relate some of his war experiences, and to talk about his dear colonel, of whose courage, and modesty, and kindness he was never tired of giving instances. The young fellow was in a very weak state, and he could not so much as mention Saint-Luc's name without the tears rising into his eyes. Jeanne's last lingering remnant of prejudice against her *fiancé* died away as she listened. To her he was no longer the same person who had sickened her very soul with flattery, and whom she had almost insulted, by way of return, in old Algerian days. That Saint-Luc—that card-playing, lady-killing, unmanly Parisian—was dead—or rather, had never existed ; and here, in his place, was a brave soldier, a perfect gentleman, a delightful companion, of whose friendship anyone might be proud.

And certainly it was true that the war had in many respects changed Saint-Luc for the better. Some superficial foppishness, a certain half-veiled insolence of manner, had been purged from him by the terrible realities amidst which he had lived for six months. He was more sure of himself and less sensitive than of yore. But what set him at his ease more than anything else was his speedy discovery that he need no longer fear mistrust or misjudgment from Jeanne. Meeting daily in Leon's bedroom, comparing notes as to his treatment, discussing plans for his removal from Geneva, and talking over the various

phases of the crisis he had just passed through, he and she drew imperceptibly nearer to one another, and reached at last a degree of intimacy from which neither of them could have retreated, even if so minded. But neither in the sick-room, nor in the course of any of the drives and walks which they took together by the shores of the lake, was any reference made to the engagement which still bound them both. That question appeared to be, by common consent, left in abeyance. Léon was the connecting link between them ; and it was upon Léon almost exclusively that their conversations turned.

‘But of course this sort of life could not go on indefinitely. It was but an *entr’acte*, at the close of which the personages with whom we are concerned knew that they must resume their several parts in the drama of life ; and if two of them were in no great hurry to make a fresh start, the remaining couple were less patiently disposed. Miss Barrington was feverishly anxious to get the distressing scenes which she foresaw over and done with ; and Léon, who was heartily sick of Geneva, and somewhat overrated his returning strength, importuned the doctor every day to sanction his departure for Algiers. To this, however, the doctor would not consent. The journey was too long and fatiguing a one, he said, to be attempted with safety yet awhile ; but he agreed that his patient required some change of air and scene, and suggested Montreux, at the other end of the lake, as being, from its sheltered position, better suited to an invalid than Geneva ; and Léon was rather taken with the idea. Anything to get away from that hateful town, and from the room in which he had passed so many dismal hours, he said.

To Montreux the whole party accordingly shifted their quarters one mild, sunny March day ; and with the change, the young Marquis began to recover health so rapidly that it was evident that he would not be persuaded to loiter much longer in idleness under the shadow of the rocks and crags which tower above this part of the smiling Lac Léman. He began to talk, too, in a vague way, about plans for the future, and to turn his eyes upon Saint-Luc in a questioning manner embarrassing alike to that gentleman and to others.

Whether it were owing to this unpleasant behaviour on the part of Léon, or to other not very recondite causes, certain it is that a distinct gloom and disquietude damped the gaiety of the quartet after their flitting. Jeanne, in particular, lost her spirits and her appetite, and, at such times as her brother did

not require her attendance, either shut herself up in her own room or set off on long rambles, in which Saint-Luc had too much tact to offer to bear her company.

It was on the tenth day of her stay at Montreux that she wandered up the hillside, towards the hour of sunset, to that ugly, but finely-situated Protestant church which is known to thousands of Englishmen and women. It was a beautiful, warm, still evening. The sun was sinking in a blaze of fiery and golden clouds behind the low purple rim of the Jura mountains; the snows of the Dent du Midi, and of the higher peaks on the Savoy side of the lake, were flushed with rosy light; the motionless sheet of water which bathed their base, and the villages reflected in its glassy surface, seemed not less serenely lifeless than they; and Jeanne, leaning over the stone parapet of the churchyard, and looking down upon the peaceful picture beneath her, remembered how, on just such an evening as this, she had stood with Barrington, on the ramparts at Fort Napoléon, and had seen, to her dismay, M. de Saint-Luc gallop past on his tired horse, and vanish into the twilight shades. The scene came back to her so vividly, and Saint-Luc's image was so present to her mind, that she was scarcely startled when the man himself came suddenly into view, and, slowly approaching her, sat down on the wall by her side. She was not startled; but her heart beat a little more quickly, for she felt intuitively that he had not followed her for nothing, and that the interview which she had been dreading for some days past was now about to begin.

'Is it not a lovely evening?' she said, without turning round.

'Yes. Léon wanted to come out with me, but I would not let him. Sunset is always a dangerous time, and he must beware of chills.'

'He is much stronger, though, this last week; don't you think so?'

'So much stronger, mademoiselle,' answered Saint-Luc, smiling, 'that Montreux has very nearly seen the last of him, I suspect. He is home-sick, and he is beginning to feel the want of some occupation again—and no wonder. Man is born to labour, and is never quite hopelessly unhappy except when he is idle. That is one of the things I have learnt in the last few months. I, who am fitted for nothing but soldiering, mean to devote the remainder of my days to that trade—supposing, that is to say, that I can induce our future rulers to give me some rank in the

army. At present I hardly know what I am—a colonel without a regiment, or a sword, or a uniform. Whether the coming Government will confirm M. Gambetta's officers in their grades is an open question. We shall cut a queer figure, some of us, if we are so far distinguished; but I, for one, intend to urge my claims, such as they are; and in these cases it is half the battle to be upon the spot. So I start for Versailles to-morrow morning; and it was to bid you good-bye, mademoiselle, that I followed on your track this evening—which must be my excuse for having intruded upon you.'

This was not at all what Jeanne had expected. She was troubled and taken by surprise, and did not in the least know how much might be intended to be implied in Saint-Luc's 'Good-bye.'

'To-morrow?' she exclaimed; 'that is very short notice. Why did you not say anything about your plans before? Why must you leave us so soon?'

'Because you do not want me any longer,' replied Saint-Luc, gently. 'Léon is in a fair way towards complete recovery, and will soon be able to take charge of you, instead of being taken charge of. Those who, as I do, hope to be missed a little, should be careful not to outstay their welcome. Moreover, unless I return to France at once, I shall have very little chance of getting what I want out of those gentlemen at the War Office.'

'And when,' asked Jeanne, looking straight before her, 'may we expect to see you again?'

'Ah! who knows?'

Then there was a brief interval of silence, during which Saint-Luc more than once opened his lips, as if about to speak, and then appeared to think better of it. At last he began:—

'Mademoiselle, there is one thing that must be said before we part. I thought, at first, that I would go away without alluding to the subject, and would leave Léon to explain everything to you; but now I feel that I would rather tell you what there is to be told myself. You understand, of course, that what I am speaking of is the project of a marriage between us which once existed, but which I, for my part, renounced all idea of some months back. It was then that I discovered, quite accidentally, what had been your motive for consenting to marry me—a motive, mademoiselle, most worthy of you, and one of which I have no right to complain, but which, I am happy to tell you, need no longer influence you. I must have

been very dense not to have understood from the beginning how matters were, for I remember that almost the first thing you did, when we were left alone together, that hot afternoon at El Biar—do you recollect?—was to say something about Léon's so-called debt to me ; but I suppose the truth is that I was too anxious to secure what I longed for, upon any terms, to look closely into the way in which it might come to me. I knew that I was nothing to you ; but I had always an absurd hope that I should make you love me in the end, and that, somehow or other, things would come right as soon as we were married.'

Saint-Luc paused ; and Jeanne said, in a low voice, 'I have behaved very badly to you, but it was to save Léon. And I did not know then how good you were. I thought—but it does not matter what I thought. I am ashamed of it now—I am ashamed of myself altogether.'

'Dear mademoiselle, you have no reason to be so. You told me the truth quite plainly, only I was too dull to understand what you meant ; and if excuses are to be made by one of us to the other, it is assuredly not from you that they should come. I have done mischief enough already by my selfishness and stupidity ; but happily it is not irreparable ; and you will soon forget the months of misery that you have had to undergo through my fault—soon forget them, I have no doubt.'

Saint-Luc broke off, with a half-stifled sigh, and tossed a few pebbles over the parapet, while Jeanne sat silently watching him. After a time, he resumed :—

'It was one night last November that I found out the truth. We had been in the saddle all day, moving hither and thither on the outskirts of the forest of Marchenoir, in obedience to the orders that were sent us from time to time, and hearing the cannon always in the distance, but knowing nothing of what was going on, or whether our side was beaten or victorious. When the darkness came on, we had to bivouack as best we could, without shelter or fires—for the Prussians might have been all around us for anything we could tell—and as it was bitterly cold, and a few flakes of snow were falling, neither Léon nor I attempted to go to sleep. We sat up and tried to keep ourselves warm, and talked about a great many things and people—about you, among the rest. I suppose we were both in a desponding mood, as half-frozen and half starved men very generally are ; and I remember that I spoke more

openly than usual of the unhappiness and hopelessness of my life, and said a great deal which I need not repeat; to which Léon rejoined at length, that he had more reason to feel wretched than I had, because his conscience would let him have no peace when he thought of what he had brought upon you. And so, by degrees, it all came out. It was as if my eyes had been suddenly opened. Perhaps you may think that, as I knew beforehand that you did not care for me, what he said need not have startled me so much, and that it came to nearly the same thing whether you married me because your friends wished it, or because you wanted to relieve your brother of a debt. But there is a difference; and even a very great one, to my mind. All the difference, in fact, between a voluntary and a compulsory act on your part. It shocked and distressed me a great deal more than I can tell you; and I swore to Léon, then and there, that I would neither marry you against your will, nor accept one single franc of that ridiculous money from him in any shape or form. He was a little obstinate about it at first; but when he saw that he was hurting me, as well as making me angry by persisting, he yielded, and promised me that the subject should never be alluded to again between us. In war time, you see, and when a man is carrying his life in his hand, he sees more clearly what duty and honour really are than he can do under ordinary circumstances, and is less likely to confound them with the affectations which modern society often puts in their place. Léon and I were good friends and good comrades—he had rescued me from being taken prisoner, and very possibly from being shot, only a few days before—we understood one another, and I think we both saw that it would be almost laughable that I should ruin either his life or yours because I had once done a silly thing, and had made it appear as though some preposterous sum were due from him to me.

‘But it was not appearance; the money was actually due,’ objected Jeanne, with her head averted, ‘and I still feel that he ought to pay you.’

‘I don’t think you can quite believe that in your heart, mademoiselle; but, whether or no, the matter is one between him and me, and it is done with now for good and all. And so that is the end of my long story. I thought perhaps you would like to hear from my own lips that, so far as I have the power and right to say so, you are quite free.’

Jeanne neither turned her face towards Saint-Luc nor made

any reply. There are situations in which silence seems the only possible course, and she felt that this was one of them.

'I cannot say anything,' she exclaimed at last, in a sort of despair. 'What is there to be said? Ever since I have known you, I have had nothing but kindness from you; and, in return, I have given you nothing but rudeness and ingratitude. I took you for something quite different from what you are, until the other day, when your goodness to Léon enlightened me a little. But that is no excuse. I can only entreat you to forgive me—if you can.'

She extended her hand, which Saint-Luc took, but relinquished again directly.

'I wish,' said Jeanne, wistfully, 'that you were not going away like this. I wish you could come and live close to us at Algiers, and let us try to show how grateful we are to you, and always shall be, as long as we live.'

'I am afraid that plan would hardly succeed,' answered Saint-Luc, with a rather forced laugh. 'You would not be able to help tiring of my society; and besides, I do not think you will remain in Algiers all your life. I have been talking a good deal with your friend Miss Barrington lately, and I have heard from her—something which I was not unprepared to hear. Dear mademoiselle, he is coming here—he will arrive tomorrow; and that is why I am going away. There are things which one may be resigned to, but which one cannot bear to watch. After a few years we may meet again, I hope; just at first it would be too miserable. I always liked him, though he was my rival, and was not very amiable to me; and I think he will make you happy. But no one can ever love you more than I do.'

Jeanne did not attempt to dispute or ignore the implication.

'I am very sorry for you,' she said, simply. 'It is no use to say that I am not worth loving, because one does not love people for what they are worth, but only because one cannot help it. I wish with all my heart that I could love you, for I think you are the best man I ever knew; but I cannot—it is not in my power. All I can give you is friendship; and that you do not care for.'

'Indeed I do. I value your friendship more than anything in the world, and you will always be in my thoughts in the future, just as you have been in the past. Only, although we are friends, we must remain apart—at any rate for a long time

to come. When we do meet again, all this pain and disappointment will be an old story, and most likely you will think I have forgotten it. In any case, we will never refer to it again. I shall hear of you often through Léon, who has promised to write to me, and I hope he will never have to tell me anything but the best of news of you, and all who are dear to you.

Saint-Luc was certainly behaving very generously; and during the remaining half-hour that Jeanne spent with him in the churchyard, she did what she could to show him how deeply she felt his generosity. But it is not easy to receive coals of fire without wincing; and when Jeanne went to bed that night, and mentally passed in review the events of the evening, she felt that she had been awkward and ungracious, and had left many things unsaid which she would never be able to say now.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

IN WHICH ALL JEANNE'S TROUBLES ARE DISPERSED.

THE next morning a rather dull and melancholy little party sat down to the breakfast-table. Saint-Luc had started very early, and was already many miles on his way towards France. The side of the table where he had been wont to sit was vacant; his chair was pushed back against the wall; the French newspaper from which he had been accustomed to read extracts aloud, at this hour of the day, lay unopened on a sofa. There was a mute reproach in these signs that one of the four persons who had lived together for so many weeks in harmony had dropped out of the small circle; and the three who remained exchanged sad and guilty looks while they ate their breakfast, for they felt that they had not only lost their friend, but had driven him away from among them. Miss Barrington, who, perhaps, thought she had more cause for remorse than the other two, slipped out of the room at the first opportunity, and as soon as she was gone, Léon relieved his feelings by an outburst of lamentation.

'Poor Saint-Luc!—my poor, dear colonel! How shall I ever manage to get on without him! I shall never have such another friend—never, so long as I live. So generous, so good-humoured, so ready to give the coat off his back to anybody who

had none ! Ah, my dear Jeanne, he was a man among ten thousand, though you never knew it—you could not very well know it, having scarcely met him except in drawing-rooms. And now he has gone, and perhaps we shall never see him again. When I think of all that he has done for me, and that this is his recompense—to be turned out of the house so to speak——’

‘Don’t talk like that, Léon—pray don’t,’ interrupted Jeanne. ‘You break my heart.’

‘I am not blaming you, it is no fault of yours, only I cannot help wishing it could have been otherwise. I have been hoping for such a long time that, when you saw him again, and heard how he had insisted upon giving up that claim he had against me, rather than that you should be in any way bound to him—I have been hoping that you would see what he is worth, and reward him as he deserves to be rewarded. If you were never to fall in love with anybody—and I thought you never would—it seemed as if you could not have chosen a better husband than Saint-Luc, who worships you. But there was no help for it, I suppose. Mr. Barrington is a very charming person, and I shall be delighted to renew my acquaintance with him—only he is not my dear colonel ; and when one man takes another’s place in a party of four, it is impossible to avoid drawing comparisons between them.’

‘I am sorry that you are disappointed, Léon.’

‘Oh, my disappointment is nothing ; it is of his that I am thinking. Well, it is useless to say any more about it. Women are queer creatures.’

And so Léon picked up his stick and his straw hat, and left the room with a slow, dejected gait. He might have spared a little more sympathy for the sister who had done and suffered so much for him ; but Jeanne did not resent his petulance, knowing that convalescents are proverbially short-tempered, and thinking, besides, that he had some excuse for feeling chagrined at the failure of his hopes.

After he had left her, she sat for a long time beside the open window, thinking over all that had come and gone, and marvelling at the easy, natural manner in which her troubles had been dispersed. It seemed, as Saint-Luc had said, almost laughable that either she or Léon should have contemplated turning one or other of their lives into a tragedy because of a mere error in judgment, and she was no longer too proud to accept the gift—if gift it could be called—which he had made

to her brother. A few months ago she would have shrunk back in horror from the idea of allowing any debt incurred by one of the family—however absurd a one—to be cancelled by the free forgiveness of the creditor; but she was changed, in more ways than one, from what she had been a few months ago. Then, for instance, she would have been overjoyed beyond all power of expression, if by any means she could have been set free of her engagement to Saint-Luc; whereas now she was not overjoyed at all—only remorseful, almost regretful, and more than half-ashamed of the thrill of delight with which she had heard that Barrington was on his way to Switzerland. She was not one of those who can manage to be happy at the cost of suffering to others; and at this moment her thoughts were less with the man whom she loved than with the man who loved her, and whom she had been forced to send empty away. She was a little surprised at herself for feeling so dispirited now that her wildest dreams of happiness were, to all seeming, about to be realised; ‘but perhaps,’ thought she, ‘it is because I am so tired, and my head aches so, that I feel more as though misfortune than joy were coming to me.’

Ere long Miss Barrington re-appeared, and sat down beside her, eyeing her the while in a curious, half-guilty manner.

‘I suppose you know that Harry will be here this afternoon?’ she said.

‘Yes; M. de Saint-Luc told me he was coming.’

‘You don’t look as if you thought it particularly good news. If the perversity of human nature puts things askew again, at the last moment, after all the trouble I have taken to set them straight, I shall be much more than disgusted. I do hope and trust you are not beginning to repent.’

‘To repent? Of what?’ asked Jeanne, turning her grave eyes upon her questioner.

‘Why, of having sent M. de Saint-Luc about his business, of course. Surely we needn’t beat about the bush—you and I. We both know that M. de Saint-Luc is no more going to Versailles because he is anxious about his epaulettes than Harry is coming here for the pleasure of seeing me; and I should take it as a great favour if you would relieve my mind of doubt as to what the end of it all is to be. I dare say you don’t like talking about it, but there is nobody here but ourselves. Do just tell me that it is all right, and I will pledge myself not to ask you any more questions.’

Jeanne laughed slightly. 'I suppose it is what you call "all right,"' she answered.

'Thank Heaven for that!' ejaculated Miss Barrington, with fervour. 'At least, then, I have not made any mistake about facts whatever I may have done as to persons. I dare say you may remember my recommending you once—like the egregious old idiot that I am—to throw over your French admirer, whom I had not even seen at that time. If I had known a little more about him, I should have advised you in quite another sense, you may be sure! Not that my advice would have made much difference one way or the other, I suppose, and, for Harry's sake, I am glad you have chosen as you have done; still I do feel sorry for the other. How could you have the heart to let him go? I should not have done so in your place. But then I should have fallen over head and ears in love with him from the first. What made you take a fancy to Harry when you might have had this splendid fellow at your feet for the rest of your life?'

'Miss Barrington, you said you would not ask me any more questions.'

'Did I? Well; I don't suppose you could answer such questions as my last one if you wished. And, after all, there is good in Harry—there must be, or he would not be so universally popular as he is. Even poor M. de Saint-Luc, who had no reason to speak well of him, said a great deal in his praise. And, by the way, do you know it was M. de Saint-Luc who suggested that I should send for him? He said—and I quite agreed with him—that delay would save no one any suffering, and would keep two people out of a part of their share of earthly happiness; so I telegraphed to Harry that same day.'

'Oh, why did you do that?' exclaimed Jeanne, in a tone of great pain and annoyance. 'I wish you had not! He would have come of his own accord in time if he had wished it; and now he will think—he will think——'

'Why, Jeanne,' ejaculated Miss Barrington, in consternation, 'you are actually crying! My dear girl, all this has been too much for you. Do you know that you are as white as a sheet? You are not ill, are you?'

'No; only my head aches so,' answered Jeanne, drying her eyes.

'Go up to your own room then, my dear, and lie down and rest till I call you. Don't let us have any more tears. We are all going to be merry now, and forget the troubles that are over,

and can't be helped, and I don't want you to meet Harry with a sad face.'

Jeanne obeyed—not unwillingly. It suited her mood better to be left in solitude than to listen to Miss Barrington's moralising; and, besides, she was feeling really tired and unwell, and was glad to stretch herself out upon her bed, and close her eyes and build castles in the air, with no one to interrupt her.

Lying thus in contented idleness, she heard at length the hotel omnibus drive up from the station. She heard a good deal of talking and laughter below; she recognised the voices of her brother and Miss Barrington, and also a third voice, the sound of which called up the blood into her cheeks. And so she rose and stole softly to the window, and was rewarded by descriing from thence the top of a brown hat and a foreshortened figure, clad in an English homespun suit, which, after a few minutes, vanished under the doorway directly beneath her. Then, as every movement set her head throbbing, and as the bright light outside hurt her eyes, she returned to her bed and declined to stir, even when Miss Barrington's maid came in with a message from her mistress to the effect that Mr. 'Enery had arrived, and that she was expected downstairs.

'I really cannot move,' she said, 'my head is so bad. And I am not in the least hungry, so that if you would ask somebody to bring me a cup of tea and some toast, I would rather not appear at dinner to-night. Will you tell Miss Barrington, please, that I shall go down afterwards if I feel better?'

Miss Barrington was much amused at what she was pleased to consider a small attempt at coquetry on the part of her stately *protégée*, and was very facetious upon the subject during dinner.

'Come, M. de Mersac,' said she to Léon, as soon as the dessert had been put upon the table, 'you and I will go into the reading-room and have a look at the papers. Jeanne will be down in a few minutes, and if there are too many of us in this pokey little salon, we shall exhaust the oxygen and make her head worse. I have no doubt that Harry's brilliant conversation will act as a tonic upon her if she is allowed to enjoy it alone.'

Léon got up at once and held open the door. He could not endure Miss Barrington, whose good-humoured brusquerie always set his teeth on edge, but he fully agreed with her as to the advisability of their both making themselves scarce at this particular juncture.

'I will bid you good-night, Mr. Barrington,' he said, nod-

ding over his shoulder as he followed the old lady out of the room. 'I am still ordered to keep early hours.'

'Good-night, and pleasant dreams to you,' responded Barrington, cheerfully. 'I shan't be very late, myself, I dare say. Of all the back-breaking things I know, a journey in a French express train is the worst, and I have long arrears of sleep to make up.'

Our friend Barrington was in the best of spirits. Absence, together with sundry jealous misgivings, had fully convinced him that life without Jeanne would be simply unendurable; and knowing, as he did, that the last obstacle in the way of his union with her had now been disposed of, he was by no means sorry that their first meeting was not to take place in the presence of witnesses.

He was not kept waiting long. Miss Barrington and Léon had barely been gone five minutes when Jeanne appeared at the door—a tall white figure, looking dim and shadowy in the failing light. Barrington started up with an exclamation of joy, and presently, by some means or other—how it happened he could hardly have said—he was holding Jeanne in his arms, and her face was hidden on his shoulder, and the supreme moment, which had been deferred so often and so long, had come and gone like a flash.

About half-an-hour later the lovers were sitting together by the open window, holding one another's hands, as if they feared that something might come between them again if either of them let the other go.

'My darling,' said Barrington, 'you are not looking at all well. I did not believe much in that headache when my aunt spoke of it, but now I begin to be afraid it is genuine. Or is it that you have been wearing yourself out with nursing?'

'Oh no, it is not that,' answered Jeanne. 'I think,' she added presently, with something between a laugh and a shiver—'you will not be very much alarmed, I hope—but I *think* I am going to have the scarlet fever.'

'Scarlet fever! Good Heavens! You are not speaking seriously, are you? What makes you think so?—why did you not say anything about it before? What are the symptoms of scarlet fever? Sore throat? Have you a sore throat?'

Barrington flew into an absolute panic. He ordered Jeanne off to bed, found out the address of the nearest doctor, and despatched a messenger in search of him; summoned his aunt and Léon, put all manner of senseless questions to them, and fidgeted

from room to room, worrying everybody with inquiries and suggestions, and 'making as much fuss as a singed blue-bottle,' grumbled Miss Barrington, who did not choose to meet trouble half-way, and could not be brought to see that there was any reason as yet for all this alarm.

The doctor, however, when he came, was rather inclined to support Jeanne's own idea of the cause of her indisposition. He could not give any decided opinion before the next morning, he said; but he was bound to warn the young lady's friends that her symptoms were of a rather disquieting kind; and at the expiration of a few hours, there was no longer room for two opinions as to the nature of the case. Scarlet fever it certainly was, albeit, to all appearance, in a mild form; and when once the fact was incontestably established, Miss Barrington was as much perturbed by it as her nephew could have wished. If this had happened a fortnight ago, she said, she would not have complained so much; they had all known that, then, there was a fair chance of such a misfortune occurring. But that it should have come now, when they had given up even thinking of danger any longer, when Léon had been officially reported free from infection, and when there had seemed every prospect of the dawn of happier times, was, to say the least of it, very bad luck.

'Look at the expense of the thing alone! It only remains for you to be taken ill, Harry, as soon as we have accomplished our next move, and for me to follow suit on the stage after, and we shall have made the fortune of four hotels, and crippled our resources for years to come. If you had seen our bill at Geneva! I don't blame the people for asking what they do, because of course it must be a horrid nuisance and a great loss to them to have scarlet fever patients in their house; but really one must be a millionaire to afford oneself these luxuries more than once in a lifetime.'

'As if it mattered!' cried Barrington indignantly. 'I would gladly give up half of what I have in the world to see Jeanne well again. I know you will laugh at me, Aunt Susan, but I can't help having a conviction that she will not get over this. The very first time that I saw her, I felt sure that she was predestined to misfortune; and all the time that she was with me last night, I was haunted by a foreboding that something *must* happen before long to separate us. It is useless to reason about it, but it is beyond a doubt that there are certain people who are born to unhappiness.'

'There are certain persons who are born fools,' retorted Miss

Barrington, with much asperity. 'If you are going to talk that sort of rubbish, Harry, instead of making yourself useful, you had better be off home again, and I will bring Jeanne back to you as soon as she is in a fit state to travel. You put me out of all patience with your nonsensical fancies. I believe you would be more than half resigned to losing her if you could only be sure of taking part in an affecting death-bed scene before she went.'

'That is neither a true nor a kind thing to say,' answered Barrington, quietly. And the old lady had the grace to feel a little ashamed of her hasty words.

'There, there, Harry, you know I did not mean it. I forgot myself,' she acknowledged frankly, 'and I beg your pardon. To tell you the truth, I have been thoroughly upset by different things these last few days, and I suppose this was the last straw. Please overlook what I said, and forget it.'

The good-natured Harry readily consented to overlook his aunt's thoughtless speech; but he could not quite forget it—nor, indeed, was the poor old lady herself destined to do so. For, alas! Barrington's sinister presentiment turned out to be only too well founded, and Jeanne's portion of earthly happiness, it appeared, was likely to be a brief one. Almost before they had realised that her life might be in danger; almost before they had become accustomed to the idea that she was ill, she was sinking fast. The doctors were as powerless to save her as were Léon's frantic prayers and Miss Barrington's obstinate belief, which held out to the last, that she would be able to pull her *protégée* through in spite of all the doctors in the world. Her illness was neither so long nor so severe a one as her brother's had been; but, for all that, she could not rally from it; and those about her were forced to admit, at length, what many others have had to acknowledge before them, that what, in their first horror and incredulity, they had cried out against as impossible, not only could be, but was.

And so it came to pass that, on a warm spring evening, Jeanne lay on her bed, with a sorrowful little group around her, waiting for the end. The windows were wide open; the curtains were fluttering with a cool breeze that was blowing in from the lake; broad sunbeams streamed across the room, and fell upon the wooden floor and the white wall, and upon Jeanne's wasted hands, as they lay on the counterpane. No one could have died more peacefully. She was too weak to speak much; but she looked round upon them all—upon Léon's

pale, tear-stained face—upon Miss Barrington's rugged features, which were twitching a little, in spite of their owner's fortitude—upon Turco's big white head—lastly upon Barrington, who was kneeling by her bedside. And there her eyes rested longest.

'If only M. de Fontvieille and M. de Saint-Luc and Fanchette were here, I should have no one left to wish for,' she said once, with the ghost of a smile.

She sent messages to these absent friends, assuring them of her loving remembrance, and of her contentment and her willingness to leave the world. 'We shall all be together again very soon,' she said, with that forgetfulness of time and change which often seems to come over those who, for their part, have nearly done with both. The last Sacraments had been administered to her some hours before. At length, towards sunset, she begged to be left alone with Léon; and he, coming out, after a few minutes, but not being able to speak, signed to Barrington to take his place in the chamber of death, and then went away and hid himself.

What passed between the dying girl and the man whom she loved with a love deeper than he, perhaps, could even understand, need not be set down here. It is hard to be called away from life just when life has acquired a meaning it never had before, and when all the forfeited future seems full of brightest promise. It is hard to sink powerlessly into that impenetrable darkness, that profound silence, towards which those loved ones who are left on earth must stretch out their hands in vain. And though in some—as in Jeanne de Mersac—faith is strong enough to rob the grave of its victory, yet there is, and must needs be, a sting in death which youth could hardly bear were it not for sheer physical exhaustion. Barrington has never spoken of that last scene to any of his friends; and Barrington is a man who, with a very little encouragement—or even without it—will speak upon most subjects.

When he came out of Jeanne's room again, he was very pale, but more composed than Miss Barrington had expected him to be.

'Is it all over?' she whispered.

'No,' he answered; 'but there has been a change in the last few minutes. She does not seem to know me, or to notice anything any more. I think she has fallen asleep.'

And so it proved to be. Léon came back after a time, and the three kept watch while the daylight waned, and darkness

fell, and hour after hour slipped by ; but Jeanne slept peacefully on, and never spoke or opened her eyes again.

They watch'd her breathing thro' the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
Kept heaving to and fro.

But when the morn came dim and sad,
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
Another morn than ours.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CONCLUSION.

MISS BARRINGTON was sitting in the nursery of a country-house the other day. The children had all run out, and she began to turn over the leaves of the numerous picture-books which lay upon the table. A volume of Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales had found its way among them, and the old lady, opening it at hap-hazard, dipped into the middle of the 'Ice Maiden.' She glanced over a few pages of the story, and then grew interested, and read it through to the end, where the hero sinks beneath the blue waters of the Lake of Geneva on the eve of his marriage-day, and the poor little bride is left weeping on the island on which, but a few minutes before, the happy pair had been telling one another that earth had now nothing more to bestow upon them. 'Do you think this a sad story?' asks the author, in his quaint, friendly way, at the conclusion. These two were parted at the moment when, as they had said, earth had nothing more to bestow upon them. How would it have been with them if their wishes had been fulfilled, and they had gone back to their home in the mountains as man and wife? The night before, the bride had had a prophetic answer to this question, in the form of a dream, which consoled her somewhat in the midst of her distress.

Miss Barrington took off her spectacles and wiped her eyes, into which the tears had risen while she had been reading. It was some years since she had turned her back sadly upon this same Lake of Geneva, leaving on its shores the body of one who had become very dear to her, though their friendship had been

but short, and who had been snatched away not less suddenly than the young chamois hunter in the 'Ice Maiden.' Would earth have had anything more to bestow upon poor Jeanne if her life had been spared? Miss Barrington wondered. And then she shook her head, sighed, laid down the book, and went to the open window, whence she could see the children playing in the garden, and the sun setting behind the Scotch firs in the park.

'Would Harry have made her happy, I wonder?' murmured the old lady, vexing herself with a question which can never be of the slightest importance again. 'He was frantic with grief at first, and then, for more than a year, he went about looking so miserable that it made one's heart ache to see him. And now he is married to that dull, devoted Helen, and has got three children. It all sounds very heartless and horrible; but of course it is not so. It is only human nature, and the way of this hard world, which I am three-parts sick of myself. He seems happy enough; but I think he would have been happier with her; and perhaps—*perhaps* she would have been happy with him. But I don't know. One never can tell.'

Those whose judgment of Barrington's character has been formed from long acquaintance, and is unprejudiced by any ties of relationship, feel less uncertainty upon this point. It requires no very profound insight into human nature to perceive that a marriage between Barrington and Jeanne de Mersac must very soon have ended in disappointment and loss of illusions for one, if not for both, of them. Barrington himself was aware of this, and was in a great measure prepared for it. He knew that, after a time, he would inevitably, whether he willed it or not, drift away from his wife, fall back among old associates and into old habits, and occupy himself with interests and amusements in which she could have no share. Life cannot be one long honeymoon, he would probably have said, with a sigh over the impossibility of so blissful an arrangement, and so would have submitted with resignation to the sway of natural and social laws. Such, no doubt, is the common lot. But Jeanne, as it happened, was an exceptional person; and it is very unlikely that friendship would ever have been accepted by her in lieu of love, or the real Barrington, as he would have gradually become revealed to her, in the place of the wholly imaginary person to whom she had given all her heart. And perhaps—for there is no such thing as perfection on earth—her temper would have become soured in the long run, and she

would have grown morose and silent, and vexed her husband by appearing at breakfast with a sad face, which thing the present Mrs. Barrington is not likely ever to do.

Everyone acknowledges that there are many worse misfortunes than an early death; but the sudden removal of a young and beautiful girl, into whose hands all the brightest prizes of life seem to be on the point of falling, naturally excites more pity and sympathy than the ordinary run of human sorrows; and when the same post brought to Algiers the news of Jeanne's engagement to Barrington, of her illness, and of its terribly swift ending, a feeling akin to consternation spread among the ranks of all who had known her there.

Poor old M. de Fontvieille took to his bed as soon as the intelligence reached him, declaring that he had now nothing left to live for, and that he would never leave his room again. But as he was not ill, and as he got very hot and uncomfortable lying in bed all day, he had to get up again eventually, and go about as usual. He died, in fact, only a short time since, leaving his jewels to Léon's wife, by whom they are worn, to the admiration of all Algiers, and even of Paris, upon occasion.

And so the memory of Jeanne de Mersac, and of her untimely fate, has well nigh faded away. How long, and by how many people, can anyone expect to be remembered after death? Jeanne, during her lifetime, had had but few friends, and of those few M. de Fontvieille is no more; Léon, though he has not forgotten his sister, has ceased to mourn for her, having a wife and a young family to occupy his thoughts; and Barrington, when he thinks of her at all, thinks of her rather as a beautiful, lost vision, than as one who might have passed her life with him here, and whom he may yet encounter hereafter.

But in one of the large garrison towns of France there is a certain Colonel of Chasseurs-à-Cheval, a lean, patient, taciturn man, much beloved in his regiment, as being both a keen soldier and a good friend to all who stand in need of help, and looked upon with awe and respect by his officers as a 'man with a history,' the nature of which has been the subject of many a bold flight of fancy—a man, too, who, as the famous Vicomte de Saint-Luc, is reported to have made all Paris open its eyes in bygone days. To this grey-headed Colonel Jeanne de Mersac is in no wise dead, nor has ever died; and when he

kneels, as he does nearly every day, in the cathedral of the town where he is quartered—for he is a most devout and orthodox Catholic—he never fails to ask that he may meet her once more, in the fulness of time, where ‘they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God.’

CHEAP EDITIONS OF POPULAR WORKS.

Fcap. 8vo, limp cloth, 2s. 6d. each.

Jane Eyre. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË.
Shirley. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË.
Villette. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË.
Winning Heights. By EMILY BRONTË.
Agnes Grey. By ANNE BRONTË. With Preface and Memoir of the Sisters, by CHARLOTTE BRONTË.
The Tenant of Wildfell Hall. By ANNE BRONTË.
The Professor. By CHARLOTTE BRONTË. To which are added, The Poems of CHARLOTTE, EMILY, and ANNE BRONTË.
The Life of Charlotte Brontë. By Mrs. GASKELL.
Frankley Parsonage. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.
The Small House at Allington. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.
The Claverings. By ANTHONY TROLLOPE.
Romola. By GEORGE ELIOT.
Silver's Lovers. By Mrs. GASKELL.
Wives and Daughters: an Every-day Story. By Mrs. GASKELL.
North and South. By Mrs. GASKELL.
Ruth and Other Tales. By Mrs. GASKELL.
Mary Barton, and Other Tales. By Mrs. GASKELL.
Lizzie Leigh, and Other Tales. By Mrs. GASKELL.
No Name. By WILKIE COLLINS.
Armadale. By WILKIE COLLINS.
After Dark. By WILKIE COLLINS.
Maud Talbot. By HOLME LEE.
Annis Warleigh's Fortunes. By HOLME LEE.
The Worthington Diary. By HOLME LEE.
Warp and Woof. By HOLME LEE.
Against Wind and Tide. By HOLME LEE.
Sylvan Holt's Daughter. By HOLME LEE.
Rathle Brunde: a History of a Quiet Life. By HOLME LEE.
The Beautiful Miss Harrington. By HOLME LEE.
The Hotel du Petit St.-Jean. A Gascon Story. By the Author of "The Hotel du Petit St.-Jean."
In that State of Life. By HAMILTON AIDÉ.
Moors and Mysteries. By HAMILTON AIDÉ.
"Molly Bawn." By the Author of "Phyllis."
No New Thing. By W. E. NORRIS.
Rainbow Gold. By D. CHRISTIE MURRAY.
Recollections and Anecdotes of the Court, the Camp, and the Clubs. By Captain GRAYSON.
Hester Kerton. By KATH. S. MACQUOID.
Agnes of Sorrento. By Mrs. H. B. STOWE.
Tales of the Colonies; or, Adventures of an Emigrant.
Lavinia. By the Author of "Dr. Antonio," and "Lorenzo Benoni."
"Green Pleasure and Grey Grief." By the Author of "Molly Bawn," etc.
Romantic Tales. By the Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman."
Domestic Stories. By the Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman."
Six Months Hence. By the Author of "Behind the Veil," etc.

Men, Women, and Books. By LEIGH HUNT.
The Autobiography of Leigh Hunt. Edited by his Eldest Son.
The Town: Its Memorable Characters and Events. By LEIGH HUNT.
Imagination and Fancy. LEIGH HUNT.
Wit and Humour selected from the English Poets. By LEIGH HUNT.
A Jar of Honey from Mount Hybla. By LEIGH HUNT.
Table Talk. By LEIGH HUNT.
Autobiography of Lutfulah. Edited by E. B. EASTWICK, C.B.
Below the surface. By Sir A. H. ELTON.
Transformation. By NATH. HAWTHORN.
Deerbrook: a Tale of Country Life. By HARRIET MARTINEAU.
Household Education. By HARRIET MARTINEAU.
Thackeray's Lectures on the English Humourists.
The Four Georges. By W. M. THACKERAY.
Paul the Pope and Paul the Priest. By T. A. TROLLOPE.
Chronicles of Dastypore: a Tale of Anglo-Indian Life. By the Author of "Wheat and Tares," &c.
In the Silver Age. By HOLME LEE.
Cranford, and Other Tales. By Mrs. GASKELL.
Carlin. By Mrs. OLIPHANT.
Within the Precincts. By Mrs. OLIPHANT.

Fcap. 8vo, picture boards, 2s. each.

No Name. By WILKIE COLLINS.
Armadale. By WILKIE COLLINS.
After Dark. By WILKIE COLLINS.
Maud Talbot. By HOLME LEE.
Annis Warleigh's Fortunes. By HOLME LEE.
The Worthington Diary. By HOLME LEE.
Warp and Woof. By HOLME LEE.
Against Wind and Tide. By HOLME LEE.
Sylvan Holt's Daughter. By HOLME LEE.
Rathle Brunde: a History of a Quiet Life. By HOLME LEE.
The Beautiful Miss Harrington. By HOLME LEE.
The Hotel du Petit St.-Jean. A Gascon Story. By the Author of "The Hotel du Petit St.-Jean."
In that State of Life. By HAMILTON AIDÉ.
Moors and Mysteries. By HAMILTON AIDÉ.
"Molly Bawn." By the Author of "Phyllis."
No New Thing. By W. E. NORRIS.
Rainbow Gold. By D. CHRISTIE MURRAY.
Recollections and Anecdotes of the Court, the Camp, and the Clubs. By Captain GRAYSON.
Hester Kerton. By KATH. S. MACQUOID.
Agnes of Sorrento. By Mrs. H. B. STOWE.
Tales of the Colonies; or, Adventures of an Emigrant.
Lavinia. By the Author of "Dr. Antonio," and "Lorenzo Benoni."
"Green Pleasure and Grey Grief." By the Author of "Molly Bawn," etc.
Romantic Tales. By the Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman."
Domestic Stories. By the Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman."
Six Months Hence. By the Author of "Behind the Veil," etc.

The Story of the Plebsichte. By M. ECKMANN-CHATRIAN.
Grasp your Nettle. By E. LYNN LINTON.
Rossmoyne. By the Author of "Molly Bawn."
Gabriel Denver. By OLIVER MADDOX-BROWN.
Country Stories. By HOLME LEE, Author of "Sylvan Holt's Daughter."
Take Care Whom You Trust. By COMPTON READE.
Katherine's Trial. By HOLME LEE.
Pearl and Emerald: a Tale of Bohemia. By R. E. FRANKLIN.
Mr. Wynyard's Ward. By HOLME LEE.
By the Sea. By KATHERINE S. MACQUOID.
Basil Godfrey's Caprice. By HOLME LEE.
Mr. and Mrs. Fairbridge. By HAMILTON AIDÉ.
Isentle. By the Author of "Vera," and "The Hotel du Petit St.-Jean."
Penruddocke. By HAMILTON AIDÉ.
Brigadier Frederic: the Story of an Albanian Exile. By M. ECKMANN-CHATRIAN.
A Garden of Women. By SARAH TYLER.
Matrimony. By W. E. NORRIS.
"Phyllis." By the Author of "Molly Bawn."
Madeleine de Mercac. By W. E. NORRIS.
Mrs. Geoffrey. By the Author of "Molly Bawn."
Ben Milner's Wooling. By HOLME LEE.
"Alry Bury Billan." By the Author of "Molly Bawn."
For Percival. By MARGARET FLETCHER.
Mehlah. By the Author of "John Halifax, Gentleman."
Worls. By the Author of "Molly Bawn."
John Herring. By the Author of "Mehlah," etc.
"Portin." By the Author of "Molly Bawn," etc.
"Beauty's Daughters." By the Author of "Molly Bawn," etc.

* These works can also be had in limp cloth, price 2s. 6d.

LONDON: SMITH, ELDER, & CO.

